CANADIAN THESIS

THESES CANADIENNES

CHURCHILL, Barbra Ann

THE LOLITA PHENOMENON: THE
CHILD (FEMME) FATALE AT THE FIN ...

ISBN 0-612-82088-2
NQ-82088

1 of 3

University of Alberta

The Lolita Phenomenon:
The Child (femme) fatale at the *Fin de siècle*

by

Barbra Ann Churchill ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

Department of Comparative Literature, Religion and Film/Media Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 2003

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year this Degree Granted: 2003

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20 January 2003

There was a little girl
Who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead;
When she was good, she was very very good,
And when she was bad she was horrid. (Child's Rhyme)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **The Lolita Phenomenon: The Child (femme) fatale at the Fin de siècle** submitted by Barbra Ann Churchill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature.

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Robert Wilson

Richard Young

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David Rampton

December 9, 2002

For David, Anna and James

Abstract

"The Lolita Phenomenon: The Child (femme) fatale at the *Fin de siècle*" examines provocative images of nymphets and baby coquettes in literary and visual culture, from the turn of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, in Europe and North America. Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel, *Lolita*, provides the basis for examining the Lolita icon in contemporary popular culture, and connecting the image of the seductive, dangerous girl to the *femme fatale* figure. Material from literature, painting, photography and film are brought together in order to situate the Lolita Phenomenon in relation to past configurations of chaotic femininity. The dissertation charts a course that explores how the nymphet functions as a carnivalesque body emblazoned with cultural detritus. Rather than argue that the Lolita Phenomenon requires an aggressive feminist dismantling, this dissertation proposes that there is a transgressive pleasure in the image of the disobedient, destructive girl.

Chapter One introduces the modern Lolita Phenomenon and situates this phenomenon in relation to larger cultural values and *fin-de-siècle* moral ambiguities. The chapter also introduces the theoretical and methodological basis for subsequent analyses. The four chapters that follow are organised around the four main media; namely, literature, painting, photography and narrative film. Chapter Two examines how the complex intertextuality of Nabokov's novel produces numerous territorial tensions and destabilised spaces. Lolita emerges as an ambiguous, blasphemous character who can be readily adapted to other areas of cultural production. Chapter Three examines the Lolita Phenomenon's visual precursors in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century images of child (femmes) fatales in paintings by Philip Wilson Steer, Die Brücke, and Balthus. The fourth chapter is devoted to the photography of Lewis Carroll, David Hamilton, and Sally Mann, as well as photographs of baby-vamps in fashion advertising. Chapter Five details the nymphet syndrome in Hollywood cinema, and situates both Stanley Kubrick's and Adrian Lyne's film adaptations within larger social discourses. The dissertation concludes, in Chapter Six, by positing that images of nymphets work within paradigms of apocalypse, and that the management of young female bodies is a powerful mechanism for culture to gauge and control moral and social hygiene.

Acknowledgements

What makes *fin-de-siècle* cultural logic particularly intense is the underlying belief that existence itself can lead to either devastating catastrophe or a hopeful new beginning. In many respects, what lurks behind the research and writing processes of a dissertation is the shadow of an "end-dominated crisis," as literary critic Frank Kermode elegantly put it. Luckily, I have had the opportunity to work with many excellent scholars and fabulous people who did not allow me to spiral too far into intellectual degeneration. My supervisor, Elena Siemens, has been a source of creative inspiration and, most importantly, optimism for many years. I am profoundly indebted to her encouragement, her positive efforts on my behalf, and the fact that she allowed me the luxury of decadent indolence when I required it. Committee member George Lang's playful love of Nabokov's novel and nymphet reassured me that the end need not be devastating. Committee members Bill Beard (who is always so gracious), Robert Wilson and Richard Young, (who both came to my rescue in the final hour) are marvellous beings and exemplary scholars. I also extend my deepest gratitude to David Rampton for his thorough and thoughtful engagement with my project. I express my many thanks and blow "air kisses" to my colleagues, especially the magnificent Monique Tschofen, the particularly fabulous Paul Martin, the lovely Louisa Wei, the delightful Doris Hambuch, the noble Abdul-Rasheed Na'allah, the perfect Patricia Dold and the jubilant Jerry White. Without their laughter, I would have sunk into the depths of despair years ago. In the CLRFMS department office, Janet Ould, Lois Burton and Jeanette Rousseau brought a sense of calm to every aspect of my potentially chaotic graduate student life.

Outside the hallowed halls of academe there exists a world of spectacular and unbelievably supportive people who have kept me stable for many years. My family, without a doubt, deserve my deepest gratitude, and this project is dedicated to them. I am also indebted to the friendship and support of the beloved Linda Donnelly (who proof-read this thesis with exactitude), the courtly Richard Janzen, the beautiful Bev Moore and the warrior Saloni Negi. And of course, there are those friends who perpetually elevated my spirits: Kelly Rosborough, Estére Payne, Tracy Scott, Kevin Mager, Walter Richards, Lori and Leroy Hannah, and Laurie Bain (who always pin-points the most important things in life and memory). I also acknowledge the talented inhabitants of Melba Apartments who, over the years, have filled my walls with music and chuckles: Craig, Lane, Kevin, Dre, Amber, J. C., Eric, Pete, Tara, Tanya and the inimitable Uncle Shawn. Nor can I forget the good Doctors Larratt and Bernes (who both know that a vamp's blood is her life), and, last but not least, the stimulation of Benson & Hedges and Nabob, without which none of this would have been even remotely possible.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> **Interpretation itself needs no defence; it is with us always, but like most intellectual activities, interpretation is interesting only when it is extreme. Moderate interpretation, which articulates a consensus, though it may have value in some circumstances, is of little interest. (Culler 110)**

> **What is love? Five feet of heaven in a ponytail, that sways with a wiggle when she walks. (The Playmates, 1950s popular song)**

> **Lolita Cocktail: twelve-year-old Scotch and hazelnut sherry. (Rothstein 22)**

This is a study of nymphets and baby coquettes in literary and visual culture. As the twentieth century approached not just a *fin de siècle* but the end of a millennium, the image of the seductive, but destructive, young girl began to appear with greater frequency in films, magazines and literature. In late-twentieth century popular parlance, the proliferation of these images of awkwardly graceful but demoniac girls has been dubbed "The Lolita Phenomenon," "The Lolita Syndrome," or "The Lolita Complex." In the contemporary Tokyo fashion scene, it is known as "rorikon" (Mead 108).[1] The source of nomenclature, and inspiration, is Vladimir Nabokov's notorious 1955 novel *Lolita*, which concerns an older European pedant, Humbert Humbert, who becomes embroiled in a life-wrecking affair with a bubble-gum-chewing, comic-book-reading, twelve-year-old American girl. The Lolita image has so pervaded popular consciousness that even those who have never read the book usually know what it means to call a girl a "Lolita." The moniker "Lolita," translated into the language of popular culture, means a sexy little number, a sassy *ingénue*, a bewitching adolescent siren. Lolita's name is a diminutive evocation of the courtesan Lola Montez, as well as Joseph von Sternberg's cinematic Lola Lola, and, as critic Camille Paglia notes in "Lolita Unclothed," "implies a kind of infantilization of this figure of adult sexuality," a form of "child's play, a sort of breaking of the taboo, a profanation of childhood language [...]" (147). Lolita is what I prefer to call a child (femme) fatale. She is a figure that conflates the notion of childhood (already a loaded term from an historical perspective) with the image of the *femme fatale* (a sexual stereotype with antecedents in *fin-de-siècle* Europe). Humbert's obsession with this girl-child is not only an act of sexual transgression, but an act of textual transgression in which the girl, Dolores Haze, is clothed in covert and overt intertextual allusions to past configurations of desirable and taboo female sexuality.

---

[1] "Rorikon" is what some critics have called the "dark side" of the Japanese "manga" entertainment phenomenon. Sailor Moon, the most recognisable animated character of the "manga" phenomenon, initiated the "rorikon" trend in fashion, followed by stories of Japanese schoolgirls selling their sailor suit school uniforms to speciality sex shops. See Steve Weatherbe's article, "The dark side of Japanese pop culture," for a discussion of the "manga" phenomenon.

Critics, scholars and lovers of Nabokov's novel often lament that the Lolita Phenomenon evacuates Nabokov's creation of all complexity; that is, she is hollowed out and misrepresented in popular media. Nabokov's "original intention" has been distorted, they say. Reviewer John Marks, in his article, "Lolita, a Girl for the '90s," after consulting with literary critics, says,

> In her popular incarnation, Lolita is a sexualised child kissing the camera. She also bears little resemblance to Nabokov's original. Like Marilyn Monroe, Lolita has been transformed by the machinery of mass culture, which changes everything it touches into a new and

> infinitely flexible form, a kind of brand name that can pass from one medium to the next, from book to film to television to fashion ad. (70)

The Lolita Phenomenon, it seems, is one way for literati and literary scholars to feel smug. Nabokov's novel, most will say, "did not call forth this universe of images" (Marks 70), or that the Lolita Phenomenon is a product of the "ongoing history of [the novel's] misreading and misuse" as one scholar put it (qtd. in Marks 70). Literary scholar Ellen Pifer, in her book, *Demon or Doll*, states, "Having made her way into popular culture, Lolita has given rise to a cultural icon and a popular canard" (66).

Such commentary appears to parrot Nabokov's warning, in *Strong Opinions*, when he states, "I think that the harmful drudges who define today, in popular dictionaries, the word 'nymphet' as 'a very young but sexually attractive girl,' without any additional comment or reference, should have their knuckles rapped" (133). Nabokov's comment, however, is far more flexible than it at first appears. His gripe with "harmful drudges" is that their lexicon is too simple, that nymphets in popular culture are not given the necessary "additional comment or reference." Of course a nymphet is a very young and sexually attractive girl. Lolita is a girl whose presence alone can send Humbert Humbert into priapic spasms of delight. Then again, many other figures give Humbert similar spasms. When he surveys his sexual landscape, he sees nymphets in the most unusual places, both in literature, the visual arts, and on the streets. For example, Dante's sacred Beatrice is a nymphet; Petrarch's beloved Laura is a nymphet; the Biblical Rahab is a nymphet; an ancient Egyptian painting of Akhnaten's "pre-nubile Nile daughters" with "their soft brown puppy-bodies, cropped hair and long ebony eyes" (*Lolita* 19) are nymphets; a pert

Parisian prostitute named Monique is "a delinquent nymphet shining through the matter-of-fact young whore" (23).

Similarly, when we survey the contemporary textual landscape, we notice that nymphets have appeared everywhere in popular culture, most notably in film, advertising, and news stories that turn into television docudramas, as was the case with the infamous "Long Island Lolita," Amy Fisher.[2] The Lolita Phenomenon includes the scandal that surrounded the book's initial publication, and the scandals that accompanied the two film adaptations, one in 1962 and the other in 1997. It includes nymphets in fashion photography, along with fashion designer Vivian Westwood's thirteen-year-old catwalk models in her 1997 show. The phenomenon ranges from little girls tarted up for youngster beauty pageants, such as the tragic case of JonBenét Ramsey,[3] to the scandal of the fifteen-year-old porn queen, Traci Lords, who consciously duped the entire early-1980s porn industry with her bad girl pout, voluptuous body and sure sense of her own sexual dexterity. Lolitas in the popular music industry include "The Killer" Jerry Lee Lewis's fourteen-year-old gum-chewing wife in the 1950s, as well as young female singers cum teen pin-ups, such as the devoted "virgin snake-charmer," Britney Spears, in the late 1990s.[4]

---

[2] Writer and journalist Elizabeth Wurtzel, in her book, *Bitch*, discusses, with much humour and sensitivity, the Amy Fisher story as part of the larger Lolita Phenomenon in her chapter, "Hey Little Girl is Your Daddy Home." Wurtzel claims, "Amy Fisher became a story because it was about a teenage girl and it involved sex and violence—and automotive mishaps—and other titillating stuff [...]" (96).

[3] In Paglia's on-line column, "Ask Camille," for *Salon*, she addresses the question of "Why we leer at JonBenet" by stating, "The prostitution and martyrdom of JonBenet Ramsey has become a strange meditation device for American sentimentalists who can't let go of the pre-Freudian idea of childhood as a sexless paradise garden befouled by serpent adults" (par. 7). Paglia describes the situation as "little JonBenet flirtatiously strutting her stuff as a rhinestone cowgirl or feather-laden Ziegfeld Follies mannequin," and the beauty pageant scene as full of "preening baby geishas" (par. 3). See also Henry Giroux's article, "Innocence Lost: Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Abuse," for a discussion of these "sultry Lolita-like beings" (28).

The Lolita figure, I argue, is a socially disruptive trans-textual creature, a *petite femme fatale* whose visage breaks the very rules by which contemporary notions of girlhood innocence are constructed. I should, no doubt, have my knuckles rapped on occasion, but my approach to this particular phenomenon is to create the additional comments or references, like lengthy Nabokovian footnotes, to a larger cultural phenomenon. My purpose is to examine the way the arts, both high and popular, interact with society, and the way society responds and reformulates the arts. Lolita, both the character and the icon, has been reformulated several times in literature and the visual arts in order to serve various social needs. I take my cue from Charles Bernheimer's 1993 "Report on Standards for Comparative Literature," in which it was concluded that literary phenomena are no longer the exclusive focus of Comparative Literature as a discipline. In light of this statement, I would propose that The Lolita Phenomenon is the perfect case study with which to test the conclusion of the Bernheimer Report; that is, that the discipline of Comparative Literature should not limit itself to literary texts alone but should also examine literature's relationship to other discourses. This is especially so in the case of Lolita, the ultimate "wayward girl," who has strayed out of the boundaries of literary discourse to engage in nothing less than palimpsestuous affairs with other forms of cultural production.

---

[4] See Heather Jones Gay's article, "With all the Charms of a Woman: The Lolita Tradition in American Popular Music," as well as Jonathan Van Meter's feature on Spears, "The Heiress Apparent," for *Vogue*.

What is typically lacking in the mountains of studies of Lolita (both novel and character), and the far too meagre examinations of her popular incarnations, is what Wendy Steiner, in her book, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, calls a "subtle investigation of our attitudes to children's sexuality and to the meaning of our gaze [...]" (49). What makes Lolita a particularly provocative figure is that she is so closely associated with childhood sexuality, "the last taboo" (Paglia, "Lolita Unclothed" 147). With this last taboo comes the current issue and politics that surround sexual child abuse.[5] This project will not, however, examine sexual child abuse or paedophilia. Such questions are best left at the doors of psychology departments. My intention is to examine how the child (femme) fatale is a type of childhood sexual persona. The nymphet's sexual persona has a dualistic nature: as Humbert points out, it is a combination of "tender dreamy childishness" and "eerie vulgarity" (*Lolita* 44). The nymphet is both high art and trash; she is desirable innocence and a common, disobedient brat. Moreover, she has existed in the arts since the turn of the nineteenth century to the present day. The nervous responses that Lolita-like creatures and her child (femme) fatale kindred generate in society indicate that these figures pose as a disruption to society's gaze at the inculcated image of the Romantic, asexual, girl-child.

The "natural child," the asexual good girl, remains a dominant cultural myth, a type of femininity around which contemporary society has organised its social institutions. "A cultural myth," critic Nina Auerbach posits in her book, *Woman and the Demon*, "thrives in large part because it lives below the formulated surface of its age; rarely does it crystallize into explicit gospel or precept which the conscious mind can analyze and reject" (10). Cultural critic Valerie Walkerdine, in her extremely relevant study, *Daddy's Girl*, questions the cultural validity of the myth of the "natural" girl-child by stating that

---

[5] Annette Michaelson, for example, in her article, "Lolita's Progeny," addresses the issue of how the Lolita figure is related to the myriad ways sexual child abuse has been constructed in society, from the McMartin Day-care fiasco, to photography as a form of abuse.

> the good and hard-working girl who follows the rules prefigures the nurturant mother figure, who uses her irrationality to safeguard rationality, to allow it to develop. Consider then the threat to the natural child posed by the eroticized child, the little Lolita, the girl who presents as a little woman—not of the nurturant kind, but the seductress, the unsanitized whore to the good girl's virgin. (169)

More importantly, as Walkerdine proposes, "popular culture lets [the little Lolita] into the sanitized space of natural childhood, a space from which it must be guarded and kept at all costs" (169). The disruptive child-seductress is not simply a popular culture icon that exists gratuitously. Contemporary culture is fascinated by images of girlhood depravity, at once enjoying the spectacle, then subsequently pathologising it.[6] I examine the child (femme) fatale's origins in both high and popular culture, and attempt to examine the reasons why popular culture invites this figure into the sanitised and sacred space of childhood. It may be, as Paglia has suggested, "Everything sacred and inviolable provokes profanation and violation" (*Sexual*

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[6] For example, psychologist Sibylle Artz's book, *Sex, Power, & The Violent Schoolgirl* (1998), as the back cover copy informs us, involves "six gripping case studies" that provide a "fascinating glimpse" into the world of the violent schoolgirl, and provides the necessary "impetus for social action" and treatment.

Personae 23). My study is a search for nymphets in all their beauty and scandalous pleasure, as well as all those embedded cultural myths, ideologies, and meanings that follow them like so many Humbert Humberts.

The following study involves a close textual analysis of the numerous nymphets I bring into my argument. By doing so, I can examine not only the literary and visual rhetorical devices that make up the child (femme) fatale's image, but can begin to disentangle the intertextual nature of both the figure and the discourse. More importantly, I also include an historical and a contextual analysis. I argue that the Lolita types who appear in both high and popular culture are ideologically related to the equally disruptive and dangerous figure of the *femme fatale* from both the nineteenth century's *fin de siècle*, and American *film noir* of the 1940s. Lolita, like the *femme fatale*, poses a threat to configurations of idealised, inviolate, femininity by presenting a naughty, often nasty, image of girlhood. This image of the not-so-wholesome girl is not, as we will see, a new phenomenon, but is part of a cultural continuum from the turn of the nineteenth century.

I believe that there is a profound correlation between the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* and the turn of the twentieth century. Literary and cultural critic Elaine Showalter, in her book *Sexual Anarchy*, argues, "From urban homelessness to imperial decline, from sexual revolution to sexual epidemics, the last decades of the twentieth century seem to be repeating the problems, themes, and metaphors of the *fin de siècle*" (1). Much like a repetitious carnival, the new *fin de siècle* is not exactly identical to that of the previous century, but repeats patterns, anxieties and discourses employed by previous generations. Lolita, the child (femme) fatale, fulfils the same role as the *femme fatale* did at the turn of nineteenth century. The corrupt and devouring woman at the turn of the nineteenth century was an emblem of all that was wrong with modernity and industrial capitalism. The Lolita figure, likewise, functions as a grotesque body, a post-modern emblem of urban decay, disease, and the possibility of technological failure. She is the personification of the dread that always accompanies a transitional state. Art critic Lynda Nead, in her book, *The Female Nude*, echoing Mary Douglas, explains that all "transitional states [...] pose a threat; anything that resists classification or refuses to belong to one category or another emanates danger" (6). The child (femme) fatale is both child and woman, innocent and depraved, violated and triumphant: she embodies the transitional.

Few scholars have noted the ideological correlation between the virgin-sirens of nineteenth-century literature and visual art and our present-day representations of "nymphets" and "naughty" young girls. Art historian Bram Dijkstra, in his sweeping historical analysis, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (1986), notes that woman's transformation from saintly household Madonna to sinister *femme fatale* in nineteenth-century visual culture led to an increasing interest in paintings and photographs of children which, as he states, "often emphasized analogies between the actions of nude little girls and the familiar poses of vanity or physical arousal given to adult women by turn-of-the-century artists [...]" (193). Lewis Carroll, for example, photographed a veritable catwalk of nude and semi-nude little girls. And while his photographs seem quaint and innocent from a contemporary perspective, his compositional and thematic strategy included the then familiar conventions of *femme fatale* iconography. Nor can we forget Lolita's literary antecedents such as Gustave Flaubert's infantile but seductive Salomé, or Emile Zola's child-Eve, the innocent temptress Albine. Nabokov's novel articulated a correlation between the past and the present, and thus resurrected, through ludic parody, the decadent strain of Romanticism complete with the figure of the *femme fatale*.

Where Nabokov's novel was revolutionary for popular culture was in its reinvention of the *femme fatale*. As Simone de Beauvoir points out in her book, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*, the sexually liberated, financially secure modern woman does not make a very interesting, or dangerous, *femme fatale* or vamp: "In an age when woman drives a car and speculates on the stock exchange, an age in which she unceremoniously displays her nudity on public beaches, any attempt to revive the vamp and her mystery was out of the question" (10). Key to the *femme fatale*'s image is her mystique, that which is hidden and forbidden. Her visage provokes a sense of the dangerous, the transgressive, and the socially disruptive. The Lolita-figure slips into the cultural gap where the *femme fatale* once existed. She is "a return of the repressed" (*Sexual Personae* 13), as Paglia would say, complete with her socially disobedient behaviour and all the challenges she poses to ideal domestication. Because she is without the good girl's sexual innocence, the child (femme) fatale's femininity always escapes socially accepted middle-class boundaries.

Cultural memory is not so short that the motif of the child (femme) fatale from the closing decades of the nineteenth century has been long forgotten. Early formulations of child-sirens in the nineteenth century continue to exist in various media in the twentieth century, albeit in modified form in order to express present-day societal problems. As I mentioned previously, the image of the child (femme) fatale is one of disruption and anxiety; in particular, anxiety about the future of contemporary society. When Rousseau heralded the "natural child," untainted by civilisation, the child became a Romantic metaphor that critiqued Enlightenment rationality. The child in late-twentieth-century culture similarly functions as a metaphor or emblem. However, the image of the child (femme) fatale is a symbolic or metaphoric representation of an imagined disastrous future where youth, corrupted by adult society, perpetuates corruption. Our poster-child for the future is often far from optimistic, for the child (femme) fatale's provocative masks and poses are pessimistic emblems of a chaotically unfolding future. And provocation can, of course, assume many poses.

In order to explore the question of the child (femme) fatale's precursors, and her later incarnations, Marjorie Garber's study of transvestism, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (1992), provides some excellent theoretical propositions. Garber posits the notion of the "third term" which, when introduced into traditional binary constructions, disrupts and questions deeply embedded social codes. The concept of "childhood" is an excellent example of a construct that is codified into a binary model; that is, the child is defined by what it is not: childhood is not adulthood. The brave research of literary and cultural critic James R. Kincaid, in his two books, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992), and *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (1998), stresses the way in which our culture has constructed innocent childhood as a normalised discourse of "nots" or vacancies—the child is not sexual, not corrupt, not burdened by adult responsibility (*Erotic Innocence* 14-15). However, fissures and ruptures in the image of idealised (or "vacant") childhood occurred in the late nineteenth century, and continued to occur in the twentieth century due to the "third term" or, specifically in my study, the child (femme) fatale.

Furthermore, fissures and ruptures in images of idealised childhood are indicative of what Garber would call a "category crisis" which calls attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances. For Garber, a category crisis means "a failure of the definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (16). For our purposes, the child (femme) fatale similarly marks a site of permeations and crossings between the categories of child/adult, innocence/experience, acceptable/obscene and even past/present. The various categorical breaches have been articulated by art historian Ann Higonnet in her book, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (1998), in which she examines the image of "ideal childhood" and how it has been rendered problematic by images of what she calls "Knowing children." Her concept of "Knowing children" is, as the title of her book indicates, a "crisis."[7] Higonnet's study proposes that the proliferation of images of "Knowing children" are part of contemporary society's current re-examination of the notion of childhood, but she fails to acknowledge the origins of this crisis in late-nineteenth-century antecedents in both literary and visual production. Just as the nineteenth-century image of woman as the "angel in the household" has her disruptive counterpart in the *femme fatale*, so the image of the innocent girl-child has her foil in the child (femme) fatale.

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[7] For social critic Neil Postman, the concept of childhood is not only in a state of crisis, but is disappearing altogether as the title of his 1982 book, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, indicates. Postman argues that children now have access, via media and new technologies, to what was formerly adult-only information. Since Postman defines children as "a group of people who do not know certain things that adults know" (85), their access to certain knowledge erodes the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and thus renders childhood itself as non-existent.

Like Humbert Humbert, we read the past in order to try to explain our origins, and to tell the story of our current pleasures and problems—or even the problems with our contemporary pleasures. Perceiving the past as the origin of present anxieties and problems is much like a nympholept's search for the nymphet. As Humbert would say, "It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight" (*Lolita* 18). It is not my aim to trace out a linear, causal historical analysis from the nineteenth century to the present, the reason being that our perusal of the past is, ultimately, a matter of "focal adjustment." However, an examination of the *femme fatale* from the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, with a little "focal adjustment," can, in part, explain the provocative power of the child (femme) fatale, as well as the Lolita figure, in contemporary culture.

Much like Lolita and her progeny, the *femme fatale* image was both a high and a popular cultural phenomenon that dominated the late nineteenth century. The walls of salons and galleries were covered with paintings of evil women; theatrical productions loved to feature depraved and hysterical ladies; and even women's fashions were influenced by the dress codes of female malefactors. In the early years of twentieth-century silent cinema, the ultimate vamp, Theda Bara, thrilled audiences with her life-sucking and lustful persona. The depth to which this theme pervaded the *fin de siècle* has been documented in several scholarly works: Mario Praz's groundbreaking literary study, *The Romantic Agony* (1933); art historian Patrick Bade's *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (1979); Virginia Allen's *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (1983); and Edward F. Marsicano's dissertation *The Femme Fatale Myth: Sources and Manifestations in Selected Visual Media 1880-1920* (1984). These are indispensable typological surveys which establish the nature, range, and iconography of the *femme fatale* theme. The *femme fatale* as an artistic reflection of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety has been examined by Dijkstra in his remarkable survey, *Idols of Perversity*, and by literary critic Rebecca Stott in her book, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (1992). The *film noir femme fatale* has been examined by several film scholars and critics, whose articles appear in E. Ann Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir* (1980).

Because I prefer to read Lolita, both her predecessors and progeny, as popular culture reads her, I give popular culture credibility. The producers and consumers of popular culture have the ability to translate, transform, and often laugh uproariously at some of the more cherished ideals and values of society, and often with good cause. As we shall see, popular culture often translates the "safe" image of the good girl into "unsafe" territories. Yet the study of popular culture, since the time of the Frankfurt School, has often treated mass culture with suspicion. Audiences are said to be "constructed subjectivities," who are "positioned" or "sutured" into a repressive dominant ideology. While I am not denying that mass culture, or popular culture, can be hegemonic by reinscribing and perpetuating dominant ideologies, I do argue that both high and popular culture, especially when they intersect, also register disruptions to dominant ideologies; that is, popular culture can be transgressive.

Hegemonic practices, whatever they be, must always encounter the various subjectivities present in an audience. Cultural studies theorist John Fiske, in both his works, *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989), and *Reading the Popular* (1989), proposes that the reception of popular culture by audiences is varied and indeterminate. He suggests that subjectivity is "nomadic," which allows for the possibility of pluralistic, or even subversive, readings. Fiske acknowledges the reciprocity between cultural values, and how those values are then translated, for example, into advertising images. Texts reflect dominant ideologies, but when circulating within culture, they can acquire new and often subversive meanings. Cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, too, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), grants subjectivities room to negotiate, contest, appropriate or make a text one's own through poaching or violating the text's preferred reading. De Certeau argues that audiences are much like the inhabitants of a rented apartment who furnish it with their own actions and memories. As Certeau states, "He [the reader] insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body [...]" (xxi).

Cultural studies critic Graeme Turner, in his survey, *British Cultural Studies* (1990), has suggested, "If the only way to understand the world is through its 'representation' to us through language(s), we need some method of dealing with representation, with the production of meaning" (16). For most cultural theorists, the preferred method is that offered by semiotics (or a blend of semiotics and psychoanalysis, feminism and/or Marxism). Semiotic analysis can deal with a full range of signifying practices which include both literary and visual production. Because I examine such a wide assortment of texts, I employ a semiotic approach influenced by both Roland Barthes's structuralist semiotics, as well as Fiske's cultural studies approach to decoding the various signifying practices. Theoretical issues raised by an examination of the image of the child (femme) fatale in both high and popular culture involve not only an examination of signifying practices, but a recognition that texts are limited by their cultural specificity and historical contingency. Moreover, a text is subject to shifts in perception and reception from one context to another as signifying practices change from one period to the next. For example, an image of a child (femme) fatale such as Charlotte Baker, when photographed by Gustave Rejlander in the nineteenth century, does not look like Patrick Demarchelier's fashion photographs of the child (femme) fatale, Devon Aoki, in 1999. However, by examining each image within the context of its production, the two images do indeed share certain similarities. Both girls, whether nude or dressed, are semiotically draped in the codes of dangerous female sexuality.

Kaja Silverman argues, in her book, *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), that "signification cannot be isolated from the human subject who uses it and is defined by it" (3). Walkerdine's study, for example, attempts to address how real little girls, in the practice of their everyday working-class British life, can appropriate popular culture's pleasures to serve their own purposes. She concludes that, more often than not, the appropriation of popular culture by young girls is far from pernicious in terms of how girls come to define their subjectivities. Popular culture often serves to disrupt dominant ideologies about gender or class. How "good girls" should behave, Walkerdine proposes, may not necessarily be so "good." That the highly provocative nature of the image of the child (femme) fatale often elicits such strong reactions (including indignation or moral outrage) signals the fact that the image is more often than not a challenge to constructions of idealised femininity in general. What is important for my study is the investigation of how adults perceive the girl-child, and what the adult voyeuristic gaze at girlhood reveals about the construction of femininity's "origin." Wordsworth's poetic dictum that the child is the father of the man also means that the girl-child is the mother of the woman.

Nabokov claims, in his afterword to *Lolita*, that the only thing that matters in a work of fiction is "aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (314-315). Nabokov's concept of "aesthetic bliss" resembles what Steiner calls "enlightened beguilement" which we experience when confronted with works created by "provocateurs," be it in literature, painting, photography or film. My readings of both high and popular culture also take their cue from Steiner, who points out, "There is a pleasure in being shocked, in being ridiculed for one's conventionality, in looking at a piece of wit in which the absolutely most proscribed taboo is presented as formally pleasing" (56). Lolita, and childhood sexuality, the "last taboo," has been presented in formally pleasing ways by the painter Balthus, in advertising images, in canonical literature and "best-sellers," and in art-house films and mainstream Hollywood films. Steiner's definition of art not only embraces the virtual space created in a work of literary or visual art, but keeps one eye on larger social issues.

Feminist critics, with their eye only on social issues, claim that one should read against the grain of Nabokov's (and Humbert's) claim to aesthetic bliss. This is an approach used in Linda Kauffman's analysis of Nabokov's novel in her book, *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*. In other words, a referential reading (rather than a self-referential reading) is required to politicise and lay bare the ugliness and brutality of paedophilia and incest in the real world, along with the textual trickery employed to cover up the actual pain suffered by Lolita (and other real girls). As an image, Lolita, and the child (femme) fatale, does not need Kauffman's assistance. Steiner would assert, "To engage with an artwork's connection to ideologies—benign or hurtful—and still feel the work's brilliant virtuality: this is aesthetic experience at its fullest" (93).

An intertextual interpretative strategy is necessary not only to reveal the Lolita Phenomenon's connectedness to ideologies—dominant or subversive—but to connect those ideologies to past textual practices. Barthes claims, in *S/Z*, that the reader "is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (10). Like de Certeau's reader who insinuates him/herself into the text with the ruses of pleasure, Barthes's reader is, like the text itself, a composite of intertextual references to other texts and shared cultural understandings or codes. Barthes notes, "Alongside each utterance, one might say that off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes: in their interweaving, these voices (whose origin is 'lost' in the vast perspective of the already-written) deoriginate the utterance [...]" (*S/Z* 21). Both reader and text are repositories for multiple codes and meanings, and thus understanding an image is part of the relationship between the reader of the text, and the text itself. What I wish to show are some of the origins of the image of the child (femme) fatale, those "off-stage" voices that I believe are only provisionally lost or forgotten. The power of the image of the child (femme) fatale lies precisely in the various references to past cultural catalogues that are always already present in literary and visual culture. The "utterance" may seem to be "deoriginated," but the codes and off-stage voices used to interpret texts do not appear *ex nihilo*. Thus my decoding of literary and visual images is a form of demystification—not to politically disarm them or to render them speechless, as Kauffman would wish; nor to do what feminist film critic Laura Mulvey proposes in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," that is, to analyse pleasure and beauty in order to destroy it (24). Beauty, I argue, is not repressive.

Humbert's strategy for defining the beauty of a "nymphet" involves being an "artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine [...]" (17). Humbert's definition of nymphet beauty involves not only artistic creativity, but a way of seeing and desiring. Humbert also specifies that not all girl-children are nymphets. In order to discern a nymphet from among the throng of "provisionally plain, or just nice, or 'cute,' or even 'sweet' and 'attractive,' ordinary, plumpish, formless, cold-skinned, essentially human little girls, with tummies and pigtails" there must be a "focal adjustment" (17). The focal adjustment necessary to discern the demon nymphet requires that we not only examine the image of the *femme fatale*, but the concept of childhood itself. That the motif of the child (femme) fatale resonates in our culture, like a low continual murmur, partly helps to explain our current (re)formulations of the image of the child and the notion of childhood itself.

"Child" and "childhood" are rather slippery categories to begin with. Constructivist historian Philipe Ariès, in his influential work, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), has demonstrated that what we conventionally call the child did not in fact exist prior to the modern era. Young people were not fixed in conceptual or definitional categories, and childhood certainly had little to do with sexuality, or lack thereof. His analysis of literature, painting, toys, dress and educational systems reveals that the increasing interest in defining childhood, and placing it at the centre of our culture's structures, coincides with the rise of the middle-class in Western Europe. Prior to the centring of the child in society, childhood was viewed as a necessary, but hardly interesting, transition to the adult world. The definitional categories of childhood and adulthood were, as well, not fixed or stable age categories, but went hand in hand with their social functions. The increasing biological and psychological interest in the child, in the nineteenth century in particular, did not contribute to clearer definitional boundaries between the child and the adult. Although it is easy to claim that our nineteenth-century ancestors had a clearly articulated definition of "childhood," this is not necessarily the case. If anything, the more that social and biological discourses were brought to bear on scrutinising the child, the more complicated matters became.

Because the latter part of the nineteenth century so thoroughly poked and prodded the bodies of the very young, and reorganised its social systems to accommodate this new invention, two of the previous century's notions are still very much with us, and thus have a bearing on this study. The first is the biological concept of "puberty" in which sexual development, especially in little girls, marked the end of "innocent" childhood, since innocence was perceived as a lack of sexuality. That biological categories of childhood developed out of sexual understandings is important to note, for this notion still plagues present-day understandings of childhood; that is, the ideal child is still perceived to be asexual, despite Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). The second important nineteenth-century concept that I consider is the deeply ingrained, though reformulated, Rousseauesque Romantic understanding of childhood as a metaphor for purity and a state of being untainted by a corrupt adult world. These two understandings combine to form present-day notions of childhood.

Twentieth-century understandings of childhood are as muddled as they were in the nineteenth century, and this confused state of understanding is our real inheritance from the nineteenth century. Then, as today, the "child" is a biological category, a psychological category, a social role, and a metaphor all bundled into one little package. Though Humbert specifies the ages nine and fourteen as the age range for nymphets, in contemporary society, as Kincaid argues, the child "is not defined or controlled by age limits, since it seems to me that anyone between the ages of one day and 25 years or even beyond might, in different contexts, play that role. What a 'child' *is*, in other words, changes to fit different situations and different needs. A child is not, in itself, anything" (*Child-Loving* 5). For my purposes, the child (femme) fatale can stretch beyond the age limits imposed by Humbert, for even Humbert admits at one point, "Despite [Lolita's] advanced age, she was more of a nymphet than ever [...]" (*Lolita* 230).

This study is divided into four chapters that cluster my research around the four main types of media that dominate our cultural landscape: literature, painting, photography and narrative film. The grouping of my research in this way serves two practical purposes. The first is a matter of simple organisation: because I am dealing with numerous cultural artefacts, it is simply expedient to examine representations of the child (femme) fatale within each medium. Secondly, each of the media has developed its own mode of analysis and its own textual history. Where relevant, however, I note when the arts interact and inform each other. For example, paintings of *femmes fatales* influence Stanley Kubrick's film version of the nymphet, and paintings play a significant role in advertising images. Literature is adapted into film, and cinema influences literature, as is the case with Nabokov's novel.

In the chapter that follows, titled "Lolita and Her Phenomena," I examine Nabokov's novel in terms of its connectedness to representations of the *femme fatale*. I begin by discussing Nabokov's nymphet as a form of blasphemy of the image of ideal girlhood, and how that blasphemy is connected to nineteenth-century literary depictions of icons of depravity. I discuss how the character Lolita works within several mythologies and sets of clichés as they relate to representations of femininity.

Nabokov's intertextual strategy overlaps European literary traditions from the nineteenth century with various forms of visual culture such as painting, photography, and film. Lolita is a carnivalesque creature inscribed with both high-brow aesthetic and low-brow popular pleasures. As we will see, Nabokov's novel relies to a large extent on both the *fin-de-siècle* image of the *femme fatale* as well as the *femme fatale* of 1940s *film noir*.

Chapter Three, "Visual Transgressions," explores the numerous ways of imagining nymphets and baby coquettes on canvas. Nabokov's novel often employs the codes of visual culture to construct Lolita as a child (femme) fatale, and as a work of visual art in which she functions as an object of Humbert's erotic desire, and a source of his own feelings of dread. Because painting, like the notion of childhood itself, is a manipulated construction, any painting of a girl-child has the power to reproduce not only an actual girl, but also acts as a personification of cultural values. With these structures in mind, I turn my attention to artists who have produced ambiguous and provocative images of girlhood. I examine the late-nineteenth-century British artist Philip Wilson Steer who came under the spell of a twelve-year-old Lolita-like studio model named Rose Pettigrew. Steer's subject matter, and his visual strategies, coincides with the increasing eroticisation of young girls in Victorian England. In Germany, the avant-garde Die Brücke artists found that images of the pubescent girl's body served as an apt expression of both the tensions of the early-twentieth-century and as a shocking visual critique of modernity. Finally, the provocative painter Balthus, whom Nabokov admired, perfected the art of painting languishing, disturbingly erotic nymphets whom Nabokov referred to as "Lolita-like creatures" (*Strong Opinions* 167). Such visual disruptions of ideal girlhood become a significant aspect of the Lolita Phenomenon in late-twentieth-century popular culture.

In the fourth chapter, "Photographing the *Fruit vert*," I deal with a medium that has recently been subject to strict public censure. I continue to argue that the image of the child (femme) fatale challenges the image of the upright good girl, and embodies the threat of the rebellious, the morbidly diseased, and the degenerate, who threaten to topple civilised society from within. I explore the nineteenth century, with the invention of photography, and pay particular attention to the amateur photographer Lewis Carroll who, in his photographs of his little friends, staged the "natural innocence" of girlhood, but included the visual codes of adult female sexuality. I then turn to twentieth-century professional photographers David Hamilton and Sally Mann. Hamilton, who has been called a pornographer, works within the idealising and the eroticising traditions of nineteenth-century visual culture simultaneously. His ambiguous depictions of adolescent girls often employ both the visual codes of dangerous female sexuality and the visual rhetoric of pornography. Sally Mann, on the other hand, in her photographs of twelve-year-old girls, uses the conventions of the documentary "snapshot" to subtly undermine the concept of the portrait, as well as the visual tradition of idealised, domestic, femininity. I pay particular attention to the Lolita Phenomenon in fashion photography, where numerous nineteenth-century visual traditions overlap with contemporary practices and anxieties. I also concur with Paglia's statement, made during her 1991 M. I. T. lecture, that "fashion magazines are part of the history of art" and that "the history of fashion photography from 1950 to [the present] is one of the great moments in the history of art" (*Sex, Art, and American Culture* 261-262).

Chapter Five, "Sacred Monsters of the Cinema," focuses on cinematic representations of the child (femme) fatale. Film, the most dominant and popular form of narrative for the late twentieth century, has been particularly adept at exploring and transforming the Lolita figure to suit social needs. I situate Lolita and her kind in the history of film and its preoccupation with girlhood. Rather than simply seek Lolita's origins in youngish, or even very young, early-twentieth-century Hollywood stars, such as Mary Pickford or Shirley Temple, I argue that the contemporary celluloid Lolita is ideologically related to the *femme fatale* of 1940s' American *film noir*. I examine both adaptations of Nabokov's novel by filmmakers Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne. By doing so, I demonstrate that both film versions of Nabokov's novel construct the demon nymphet as socially disruptive by drawing from *film noir* sensibilities and, especially, the image of the *femme fatale*.

By browsing through the various media, occasionally stopping to ponder a figure, image or ideology, I wish to show that the notion of a *fin de siècle* is a cultural event replayed at the turn of the twentieth century, though in a post-modern reformulation. The body of the girl-child, the little Lolita, in representation is a site around which a host of cultural fears circulate, just as they circulated around the body of woman a century ago. I argue that the child (femme) fatale is like Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque or carnivalesque body emblazoned with cultural excess. Like the *femme fatale* of the nineteenth century, the child (femme) fatale functions as a powerful metaphor for the twentieth century's *fin-de-siècle* worry about the potentially chaotic future. That the child (femme) fatale should appear centre stage in this battle between innocence and corruption, progress and decay, is not surprising. What is intriguing is how artists and popular iconographers play with this territorial tension. As we will see in the next chapter, Nabokov's novel did indeed call forth this universe of images.

Chapter Two: Lolita and her Phenomena

> **[Y]ou cannot deny that if Book X was what a huge majority of book-buyers and book-borrowers wanted to buy or borrow in a given year, or over a period of years, then Book X satisfied a need, and expressed and realised emotions and attitudes to life which the buyers and borrowers did not find expressed or realised elsewhere [...]. (Cockburn, qtd. in Harrison 128)**

> **I've put off reading *Lolita* for six years. Until she's eighteen. (Groucho Marx, qtd. in Corliss, *Lolita* 73)**

> **Innocence is a lot like the air in your tires: there's not a lot you can do with it but lose it. (Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence* 53)**

I.

Critic Camille Paglia, in "Lolita Unclothed," argues that "Nabokov's novel is a final corruption of the tradition of the veneration of the child that in fact was created by Rousseau and Wordsworth at the birth of Romanticism" (146).[8] She further claims that "this motif of childhood sexuality" is "the last taboo" (147). Nabokov's *Lolita* certainly deals with the last taboo for, simply put, the novel is an aesthetically articulated story about desire for, and sex with, an underage (therefore absolutely forbidden) girl. It is not simply the sexual subject matter that corrupts the tradition of the veneration of the child, however. The novel's propensity to corrupt is derived from a two-fold operation: not only are the motifs of paedophilia and childhood sexuality treated in the language of passionate love so familiar to the decadent Romantic spirit, but the socially comforting image of a well-scrubbed, well-behaved middle-class Girl Scout is dismantled. As Paglia suggests, however, the novel's ultimate transgression is that it broaches the very idea of sexuality in a twelve-year-old girl. And sexuality is absolutely incongruent with the myth of the good Girl Scout.

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[8] Paglia is not alone in her assessment. Leslie Fielder, in an earlier review of the novel, claimed that *Lolita* "is the final blasphemy against the cult of the child" (qtd. in Pifer 69). Alfred Appel, in 1970, in his annotations to *Lolita*, made a similar observation: "Satirized too is the romantic myth of the child, extending from Wordsworth to Salinger. [...] If the origin of modern sentimentality about the child's innocence can be dated at 1760, with the publication of *Mother Goose's Melodies*, then surely *Lolita* marks its death in 1955" (*The Annotated Lolita*, 1 n.2).

Literary theorist Michael Riffaterre has proposed, in his study, *Text Production*, that in a literary work, "every word is attached to a mythology or system of commonplaces [...]" (15). In the following chapter, I discuss how the character Lolita works within several mythologies and sets of clichés as they relate to representations of femininity. Nabokov's rich and complex intertextuality combines European literary traditions from the nineteenth century, with various forms of visual culture such as painting, photography, and film. Lolita's body is inscribed with both high-brow aesthetic and low-brow popular pleasures, or "philistine vulgarity" (*Lolita* 315), as Nabokov called it in his afterword, and which transform her into a carnivalesque body that destabilises the codes associated with ideal girlhood. Rodney Giblett, in his article, "Writing sexuality, reading pleasure," points to the nymphet's carnivalesque nature when he notes that she "is the combination of the Rousseauesque innocent child and the Freudian polymorphously perverse child. She combines the official ideology of the cult of the little girl with the unofficial underworld figure of the child prostitute" (235).[9] Lolita also combines the image of the passive, asexual girl with the sexual threat of the *femme fatale*.

Her textual portrait is complex and, admittedly, Nabokov's novel has modernist subterfuge built into every possible reading. This is no doubt why popular culture has been accused of "misreading" both the novel and the character Lolita. But, as I argue, the novel's complex intertextuality, that includes myriad references to popular culture, permits popular culture to translate Lolita, and her relevant child (femme) fatale charms, in answer larger social needs and desires. This chapter will address some of the novel's textual features that have contributed to Lolita's figuration as a child (femme) fatale for twentieth-century culture. These subversive textual moments arise in the explicit territorial tensions created when categories and binary structures overlap. Binary opposites such as the "good" girl and the "bad" girl are destabilised by Lolita's paradoxically innocent depravity. By conflating the codes associated with childhood and those associated with the *femme fatale*, Lolita emerges as an ambiguous child (femme) fatale. And Humbert's European sensibilities are brought into an abrupt relationship with the startling spectacle of bumptious post-war America.

That the moniker "Lolita" is attached to a complex social phenomenon not only testifies to the complexity of Nabokov's literary creation, but indicates that the character, on her own, addresses larger social anxieties. Literary critic Harold Bloom, in his introduction to the critical anthology, *Major Literary Characters: Lolita*, remarks, "No consideration of Lolita apart from Humbert" is possible (1). Carl Proffer, as well, in his book, *Keys to Lolita*, states that "in spite of the fact that she is usually an annoying, perverse, and conventional brat, seen through the prism of Humbert's adoration, Lolita [...] becomes one of the most enchanting females of modern fiction" (41). That popular culture has divorced the character from both Humbert and the novel indicates that Lolita, conventional and enchanting as she is, can indeed function without Humbert's prism. This chapter will examine some of the mechanisms involved in Humbert's desiring prism, and in later chapters, I connect Humbert's prism to a larger "social prism." What I will argue is that Nabokov's literary creation, this nymphet Lolita, is a child (femme) fatale who provokes and disturbs conventional literary and visual images of "good girls," a provocation that, as we shall see, had already begun in the nineteenth century.

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[9] Giblett is making reference to the nineteenth century's outrage over the "white slave trade" in England, fuelled by William T. Stead's sensationalist reporting for the 1885 *Pall Mall Gazette*. In many ways, contemporary discourses about child prostitution echo Stead's sensationalism. For a discussion of Stead's series of articles, and the discourses that informed the ensuing cleansing crusades, see Deborah Gorham's article, "The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England."

II. Lolita: The Literary Phenomenon

> **The hypertext invites us to engage in a relational reading, the flavor of which, however perverse, may well be condensed in an adjective recently coined by Philippe Lejeune: a *palimpsestuous* reading. To put it differently, just for the fun of switching perversities, one who loves texts must wish from time to time to love (at least) two together. (Genette 399)**

> **Passion always seeks a form and the *femme fatale* is such a form. (Marsicano 55)**

There is always something of the provocative associated with the name "Lolita," and this provocation can trace its origins to the scandal that accompanied the publication of Nabokov's novel in 1955. Literary critic David Rampton, in his study of Nabokov's novels, *Vladimir Nabokov*, notes that public concerns about the novel in the 1950s were not simple-minded naivete, but part of "the firm belief that the publication of a book was an important event, that a novel could actually affect people's lives" (103). The cultural significance of the publication of a book in the 1950s parallels the contemporary significance of the release of a controversial film, such as Adrian Lyne's film adaptation of Nabokov's novel in 1997. The concerns that circulated around the production and distribution of Lyne's film echo, in many ways, those that circulated at the time of the publication of Nabokov's novel: specifically, the concern that perverts and pornography posed a threat to "innocence" and to the sanctity of the domestic sphere. In the 1950s, as Frederick Whiting points out in his article, "'The Strange Particularity of the Lover's Preference': Pedophilia, Pornography, and Monstrosity in *Lolita*," the nuclear family had "been elevated to the premier trope of national vulnerability," and "Humbert the pedophile threatened the home, inner-most bastion of privacy and last redoubt guarding liberal democratic freedoms" (834).

This threat to the private domestic sphere was compounded by the threat of forbidden pornographic pleasures. Since the first publisher was the unorthodox Olympia press in Paris, the novel provoked social concerns about taboo and illicit desires.[10] Nabokov's novel was subject to censure in France, was initially banned in the UK, and briefly seized by customs officers in the US.[11] Not surprisingly, when the novel was finally published in North America in 1958, it became a best-seller. Those who had hoped for a contemporary version of the first-person memoir, *My Secret Life* (ca. 1890), were terribly disappointed.[12] Moralists, on the other hand, were often outflanked by the beauty of Nabokov's language and the charming, disarming, elegance of the narrator. *Lolita* was "high art," as well as a naughty novel with enough libertine language and sexual euphemisms to raise eye-brows.

The publishing scandal also entailed a larger social scandal which was, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the "final corruption" of child worship and the cult of the child. Children, Whiting explains, were the embodiment of the private family; that is, "incarnations of innocence possessing no public existence whatsoever save their cameo appearances in the protective statutes designed to reinscribe them, ever more safely, within the domestic sphere" (834-835). Humbert's paedophilic and pornographic designs were only the tip of the iceberg of infamy. As social critic Marie Winn points out in her book, *Children without Childhood*, "It was not so much the idea of an adult having sexual designs on a child that was so appalling. It was Lolita herself, unvirginal long before Humbert came upon the scene, Lolita, so knowing, so jaded, so *unchildlike*, who seemed to violate something America held sacred" (3). *Lolita*, no novelistic middle-class idyll, included in its pages a girl who had the power to disarticulate the soothing, anxiety-free gaze at ideal girlhood in general. The girl herself was no "fragile child of a feminine novel" (*Lolita* 44), and her literary representation made very few allusions to cliché images of "innocence imperilled." Nabokov's novel, it seemed, was a veritable Peyton Place of childhood.[13]

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[10] Olympia Press offered such black market items as Henry Miller's *Plexus* (1953), translations of the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1953), George Bataille's *L'Histoire de l'oeil* (1953), and Pauline Reage's *Histoire d'O* (1954) to the then censorial US and UK markets. Maurice Girodias, the then proprietor of the press, and a self-styled transgressor, had great fun, as he says, attacking, invading, infiltrating, out-flanking and conquering the Anglo-Saxon world with his "erotic armada" (19).

[11] For a discussion of the censorial climate in France during "*L'Affaire Lolita*," see John Phillips's book, *Forbidden Fictions*, especially his first chapter, "The Erotic Novel and Censorship in Twentieth-Century France" (pp. 1-24). For a discussion of the reception of *Lolita* in the UK, as well as the parliamentary debates, see Paul Giles's article, "Virtual Eden: *Lolita*, Pornography, and the Perversions of American Studies" (pp. 57-62).

[12] Charles Rolo, in his 1958 review of the novel, noted that "there is not a single obscene term in *Lolita*, and *aficionados* of erotica are likely to find it a dud" (78).

What the novel blasphemed was the image of unsullied girlhood that had been so lovingly cultivated in the early part of Romanticism by Rousseau and Wordsworth; that is, as Paglia explains, "looking at woman and the female principle as being innocent and pure" ("Lolita Unclothed" 149). Literary and visual representations of both women and girls involved a rhetoric gleaned from pastoral fantasies of benign nature, or from religious iconography involving pure, angelic piety. For example, English writer Coventry Patmore, in 1854, poetically celebrated woman as the "Angel in the House," a trope that had tremendous impact on depictions of feminine virtue in both literary and visual culture. In France, similar images of passive femininity were reinforced by social commentators and writers. Jules Michelet, for example, in *L'amour* (1858) and *La femme* (1859), chastised women for not fully realising their "natural" potential as docile wives and nurturant mothers. As Charles Bernheimer notes in his study, *Figures of Ill Repute*, "Michelet's social goal is to educate women to acknowledge their dependence on men and the natural fulfillment of their biological destiny in marriage" (203). The image of passive, pure, and supposedly obedient woman functioned to ideologically reinscribe patriarchal structures such as family, capitalism, and the nation-state.

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[13] That Nabokov's novel was published in America a mere two years after Grace Metalious's equally scandalous *Peyton Place* (1956), is significant. In *Peyton Place*, the notion of the supposedly "wholesome" American suburb is transformed into a hot-bed of boiling desire and dirty secrets. For a discussion of both novels, see Ruth Pirsig Wood's *Lolita in Peyton Place: Highbrow, Middlebrow, and Lowbrow Novels of the 1950s*.

Central to this construction of the ideal angel and paragon of womanly virtue was her symbolic connection to the Romantic concept of the innocent child. Dijkstra notes that "women and children formed, as it were, an inevitable continuity: The truly virtuous wife was, after all, as innocent as a child" (18). For example, Honoré de Balzac's sweet Pauline, in *The Wild Ass's Skin* (1831), is a woman who retains her child-like qualities even into her married life. Balzac, constructing femininity around the virtue–vice dichotomy, introduces a series of cold, perverse women from the ousted French aristocracy, the worst being the Countess Feodora, a vain and heartless woman who rejects marriage as a "sacrament [...] of vexations" (130) and who finds the thought of children tedious. Raphael, the hero of the story, declares her to be "an affront to God Himself" (129).

The virtuous Pauline, on the other hand, is ideal femininity in all its Rousseauesque child-like simplicity. Raphael first meets her when she is fourteen years old. Eventually, they meet again and are married. Her child-like qualities remain intact, indicating that her "innocence" has remained intact as well. While Pauline frolics with a kitten, Raphael muses that his new bride is "half-girl, half-woman, as she seemed to be, or perhaps more of a girl than a woman" (178). Even after a night of marital bliss, the sleeping Pauline maintains "an attitude as full of grace as a young child's," a grace in which "the adorable attractions of childhood were added to the enchantments of love" (196). Similarly, in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), the protagonist falls head over heels in love with, and then marries, Dora, his "child-wife," for whom "reasoning is worse than scolding" (597). "I never saw such curls" David muses, "as those she shook out to hide her blushes" (368). Her adorable enchantments also include kissing her little dog, Jip, with her "rose bud mouth" (567).

The image of ideal girlhood, upon which the ideal woman was to model her behaviour, involved frolicking with, and kissing, small domestic pets, puckering her rose bud mouth, shaking her curls and blushing, all of which resembles Mary Pickford's screen persona in the early days of American cinema. Not surprisingly, these "adorable attractions of childhood" similarly prompt Humbert into his first foray into married life with Valeria, a woman whose personal style is the ability to imitate a little girl. Humbert is impressed with the way Valeria "pouted, and dimpled, and romped, and dirndled, and shook her short curly blond hair in the cutest and tritest fashion imaginable" (*Lolita* 26). Such ideal child-like women, above all else, were not to have a desiring subjectivity of their own. Humbert is outraged to discover that not only does his "child-wife" Valeria have a desiring subjectivity, but that she desires someone else—a cab-driver whom Humbert dubs "Mr. Taxovich" (28). James Kincaid, in *Erotic Innocence*, comments that our predecessors "managed to make their concept of the erotic depend on the child, just as their idea of the child was based on their notions of sexual attraction" (52). What such constructions also meant was that the ideal image of middle-class girlhood had to be carefully controlled and regulated. The ideal domestic middle-class woman and the ideal daughter were situated exclusively in the private domestic sphere. Young girls were not to stray from the manufactured middle-class ideal, for their attitudes and behaviour prefigured the domesticated middle-class wife.

The child's "quality of innocence," as Kincaid points out, was "not only 'protected' but inculcated and enforced [...]" (*Child-Loving* 72). The inculcation and enforcement of ideal girlhood innocence has been studied in depth by Deborah Gorham in her book, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. Gorham states, "The good daughter was gentle, loving, self-sacrificing and innocent: the bad daughter was vulgar, self-seeking, lazy and sexually impure" (37). The image of the vulgar and impure bad girl emerged as a trope in children's didactic literature, and served a two-fold purpose: "In part they simply reinforce the image of the good girl through the portrayal of her opposite; positive images were presented for emulation and their negative counterparts were portrayed merely so that readers could be admonished about attitudes and behaviours that they should avoid" (49). The bad girl, with her myriad inappropriate behaviours, displayed a lack of respect for the sanctity of the home, her place within rigid social hierarchies, and gender-based "separate spheres" of action (Siegel 206). The good girl served as an optimistic emblem for a stable patriarchal future. The bad girl, on the other hand, posed a notable threat.

While young girls were being admonished to adhere to certain rules of behaviour, literature for adults provided similar instruction by employing "good girl"–"bad girl" tropes. In the sentimental *oeuvre* of Dickens there is a remarkable parade of girl-types. In *David Copperfield*, for example, Dickens provides two female girl-children who are two different aspects of young femininity. David's childhood friend, Agnes, is the saintly angel in the house, the "good girl," who is described by the protagonist as having a face that "was quite bright and happy," with "a tranquillity about it, and about her—a quiet good calm spirit [...]" (209). She is David's "good Angel" (342). His other childhood friend, Emily, is the exquisite wild child, the little "hoyden," who dreams of becoming a "Lady" and thus transcend her poor, working-class situation. Her wayward aspirations and desires, however, lead to her eventual disgrace. This "fallen" young woman, though thoroughly remorseful, must be relocated to Australia in order to remove her disruptive femininity from England's fair soil. When Dickensian girlhood is rotten to the core, however, it is because of the pernicious and corrupting influence of adults. In *Great Expectations* (1860-61), for example, the young protagonist, Pip, meets little Estella, a girl-child who has been raised by her bitter and vengeful aunt, Miss Havisham, to be a regular child (femme) fatale, and who is to become, eventually, a full-grown *femme fatale*. Estella is a beautiful heart-breaker, a cold and cruel girl, and a manipulative, mercenary seducer. Bad child-rearing begets very bad girls.

In 1950s America, bad girls seemed to be blossoming like *fleurs du mal*, and despite the didactic fictions about the perils of wayward girlhood. When Nabokov's novel first appeared, it seemed to magically answer popular culture's demand for a new lexicon to describe America's problematic girls. According to Richard Corliss, 1955 was the year childhood officially ended in America:

> From the atomic mushroom cloud that hovered like a dark brainstorm over most horror movies a new species was hatched: teens. They were no longer kids and they were not yet adults, nor did they want to be [...]. Teens had their own language, mores, attitude galore and disposable income. They loved noise, leather and cashmere, jitterbugging, drag racing, gobs of hair grease—accoutrements to the joy and threat of sex. (*Lolita* 28)

Though Corliss points to 1955 as the year American childhood died, 1955, ironically, was the year in which Disneyland officially opened. The Romantic childhood of yesteryear was whisked away to a simulacral island of socially sanitised and neurotically nostalgic amusement. Here, good girls existed strictly within the realm of amusement park fantasy and animated fairy tales. Only in Disneyland, it seemed, were girls good daughters and potential good mothers of the future.

The bad girl, in her private playground of lipstick, slang, and the "joy and threat of sex," was the horror of young female sexuality outside of the socially acceptable domestic boundaries, and definitely well outside the walls of Disney's enchanted land. Because this "new species" of the feminine existed at the margins of social acceptability, she was as strange, exotic, and as threatening to patriarchy as the *femme fatale* had been in her day. Lolita and her bobby-soxer "coevals," swooning to their "throb and sob" idols (*Lolita* 149), such as Frank Sinatra in the 1940s, then to the lusty gyrations of Elvis Presley in the 1950s, were particularly disturbing. As writer Heather Jones Gay points out in her article, "With All the Charms of a Woman…," "Suddenly, America's teenage girls had become sexual beings, right out in public" (21). When Nabokov resurrected the nineteenth-century *femme fatale*, and transformed her into a pre-teen American girl he, albeit unwittingly, gave a name to these recently hatched, disturbingly sexual, young females. Lolita, a girl fast approaching the dreaded teens and draped in popular culture's accoutrements, became the name associated with America's newest little *femmes fatales*.

Lolita, like the *femme fatale* of old, is inextricably linked to notions of cultural decadence, decline and anxiety. In nineteenth-century literary and visual culture, female figures of past and present "ill-repute"—from Eve to Lucretia Borgia, from common street hustlers to *grandes cocottes* such as La Païva—served as sources of inspiration for depicting the sublime beauty of the Medusa, and provided an embodiment of social anxiety and cultural uncertainty. Ultimately, the *femme fatale* functioned as a violation of the entrenched nineteenth-century cultural standard of feminine virtue, that pure and untainted "Angel in the House," the "child-wife." Not surprisingly, Lolita likewise becomes a figure similar to the *femme fatale* of old, "so knowing, so jaded, so *unchildlike*," who seems "to violate something America held sacred" (3), to use Winn's words. She embodies the chaos and threat of American youth culture, and the prevailing mood of Cold War uncertainty and dread.

What makes Lolita seem so "unchildlike" is that in Humbert's description of the actual girl-child Dolores Haze—which occasionally seeps through the cracks of his discourse on erotic desire—she does not resemble the image of Romantic childhood reproduced on greeting cards and in framed prints. She is a far cry from the delicate, demure good girl such as Dickens's angelic Agnes. She is, as well, unlike the adorably polite girls cultivated by Hollywood cinema, such as Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet* (1944). Her "slangy speech" (*Lolita* 41), "crude nonsense" (42), "wisecracking" (55) and "vulgar vocabulary"—which includes words such as "'revolting,' 'super,' 'luscious,' 'goon,' 'drip'" (65)—is delivered in a shrill, twangy voice. Her mother, Charlotte, finds it intolerable "that a child should be so ill-mannered" (51). Dolores, her mother laments, "needs a bath" (51), an opinion even Humbert shares. He says, "Although I do love that intoxicating brown fragrance of hers, I really think she should wash her hair once in awhile" (43). Dolores Haze is far from being a pious angel in the house. She and her mother have frequent rows which, on one occasion, culminates in her declaration that "she would not go to church" (57). She is, as Humbert admits, "a most exasperating brat" (148). Even Humbert, when posing as "Jean-Jacques Humbert," thinking she was as "unravished as the stereotypical notion of 'normal child'" and clinging "to conventional notions of what twelve-year-old girls should be" (124), is surprised to discover that Lolita is radically "other."

Her departure from the "stereotypical" and "conventional" middle-class notions of girlhood accounts for comments such as those by Lionel Trilling and Thomas Molnar in their reviews of Nabokov's novel. Trilling, unable at first to muster any "moral outrage" at the content, comments that "Perhaps [Humbert's] depravity is the easier to accept when we learn that he deals with a Lolita who is not so innocent, and who seems to have very few emotions to be violated [...]" (94). Molnar, in his review, comments that "Our ethical ideal would require that we look at Lolita as a sacrificial lamb, that we become in imagination, her knight-protector." Molnar finds this to be impossible because "before yielding to Humbert, the girl has had a nasty little affair with a nasty little thirteen-year-old [...]. Besides, she is a spoiled sub-teenager with a foul mouth, a self-offered target for lechers [...]" (12). Even the inimitable Dorothy Parker, in her 1958 review of Nabokov's novel for *Esquire*, noted that little Dolores Haze "is a dreadful little creature, selfish, hard, vulgar and foul-tempered" (qtd. in Bloom 9).

Contemporary critics, such as Kauffman, are right to point out that Trilling and Molnar's comments are examples of social discourses that would blame the victim for "being a tease who 'asks for it,' and who deserves what she gets since she is 'damaged goods'" ("Framing Lolita" 60). But the key notion in Molnar's comments is that of an "ethical ideal" which inspires chivalric responses. In the 1950s, this smart-mouthed almost-teenage girl was so shockingly disparate from the "ethical ideal" of middle-class girlhood that reviewers and readers had their stereotypical and conventional notions challenged. The frail social fiction of the ethical ideal, the perfect asexual girl with her wide-eyed vacuous innocence, was becoming an impossible standard by which to measure behaviour. Trilling proposes that Nabokov may have penned a "general satire, the purpose of which is to make us uneasy with ourselves, less sure of our moral simplicity than we have been [...]," as well as a "particular satire, upon the peculiar sexual hypocrisy of American life" (95). In 1958, the character Dolores Haze seemed to break every rule on the good-girl's check-list of acceptable behaviour. "Bad, bad girl," says Dolores comfortably, "Juvenile delickwent, but frank and fetching" (*Lolita* 113). This wayward girl appeared to be too comfortable in her "disobedience," and readers were equally uncomfortable with the novel's moral ambiguity.

To further exacerbate the deconstruction of the "ethical ideal" of the pure girl, Humbert weaves subtle references to female cruelty and perfidy throughout. Lolita's nature is articulated by descriptive phrases such as "feline outline" (17), "grim Lo" (155), "cruel Lo" (161) with her "vicious vulgarity" (171). She is a "fierce-eyed child" (185) with a "diabolical glow" (214), all of which coalesce to form the powerful image of "Dangerous Dolores Haze" (172), a girl with "lips as red as licked red candy" (44). She is figured as a sticky-sweet baby-vamp. These various descriptive phrases gain even more disruptive potency when coupled with the literary tradition to which Humbert alludes; that is, a strain of late Romanticism that did not see the female principle as all that innocent and pure, but as a force of destructive nature.

It may be, as Florence Rush claims in *The Best Kept Secret*, that Nabokov had researched "acceptable psychiatric literature" (130)[14] to construct the character Humbert (along with his prism of adoration), but as Ellen Pifer notes in her book, *Demon or Doll*, Humbert's "true precursors are not the pedophiles of psychiatric case history, but those ardent disciples of romance—from Emma Bovary to Edgar Allan Poe, Don Quixote to Jay Gatsby—who in countless novels and poems suffer the fatal affliction of infinite longing, transcendent desire" (67-68). Humbert's paroxysm of transcendent desire is a substantial archaic literary trope, but not one gleaned from *Don Quixote*. Pifer's examples of "ardent disciples of romance," it must be admitted, are rather tame disciples when one considers Humbert's real apprenticeship. Humbert is, above all else, a literary scholar, a comparatist in fact, with a specialisation in French and English literatures. Prior to his arrival in America, he had "launched upon an '*Histoire abrégée de la poésie anglaise*'," and when he arrives in America, he is in the process of compiling a "manual of French literature for English-speaking students (with comparisons drawn from English writers)" (*Lolita* 16). Humbert's precursors, and his literary models, are to be located in the various points of contact between nineteenth-century French and English literatures, just as he himself is a biological descendant of a "salad of racial genes" (9). Lolita's portrait becomes a salad of female sexuality, but one tossed with textual genes drawn from primarily French and English *femmes fatales*. Proffer notes that in the salad of Lolita's "fictional forebears" the "female demons are rather more numerous than the female angels, and, as is usually the case, more interesting" (27). She is, as Alfred Appel, in his *Annotated Lolita*, calls her, "Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1819) in bobby socks" (340).

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[14] Brandon S. Centerwall, in his article, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Pedophilia," would argue that Nabokov's keen insights into paedophilia were not necessarily due to his skills as a researcher, but that he himself was a paedophile, a product of a cycle of abuse that originated in his encounters with his Uncle "Ruka."

Though Nabokov's intertextuality often looks like Humbert's map of his travels through the US, with its "wiggles and whorls" (*Lolita* 154), the intertextual barrage that contributes to Lolita's representation is one primarily gleaned from the conflated sensibilities of three nineteenth-century poets: Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Humbert opens his memoirs by invoking the American writer Edgar Allan Poe and his famous poem of mourning, "Annabel Lee" (1849), which then frames Humbert's melancholy rhapsody of desire. "Edgar H. Humbert" (189), as he calls himself at one point, claims that there "might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea." (9). Humbert's initial girl-child and lost love, Annabel Leigh, with her "seaside limbs and ardent tongue" (15), Proffer claims, "would certainly strike Poe, mourning Virginia, as a lewd, blasphemous, and unpardonable parody" (*Keys* 41). Lolita's precursor, however, is not the American Annabel Lee as penned by Poe. For generations of American readers, such as biographer and critic Kenneth Silverman, "Annabel Lee" "celebrated a nonsexual, childlike attachment" (401).[15] Humbert may be a disciple of Poe, but Poe as read by the French poet Charles Baudelaire who, with blasphemy and masochism in his eye, read in the poem "Annabel Lee" a "thirst for unrealizable love" coupled with a desire for "complete fusion with the beloved being which ends in vampirism" (Praz 147). "Monsieur Poe-poe ['s]" (*Lolita* 43) dead Annabel Lee (Leigh) is metamorphosed into Baudelaire's vampiric black Venus, his mistress Jean Duval, who bore the epithet "Quaerens quem devoret" (Praz 151).

Nor does Humbert simply read Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* (1857) and the forbidden *Les épaves*, but Baudelaire as read by the English poet Algernon Charles

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[15] Daniel Thomières, in his article, "Cherchez la femme: Who Really Was Annabel Leigh?," notes, as well, that Poe's "Annabel Lee" is "a completely chaste poem" and that Humbert's Annabel has "nothing to do with her namesake" (169).

Swinburne. Humbert's "demon child, '*enfant charmante et fourbe*'" with "dim eyes" and "bright lips" (*Lolita* 20), and with her "quicksilver in the baby folds of her stomach" (162), is Baudelaire's "Les métamorphoses du vampire" transformed by Swinburne into the equally shocking poem, and sadistic litany, "Dolores (Notre-dame des sept douleurs)," in his scandalous collection, *Poems and Ballads* (1866). In Baudelaire, for example, the lines "La femme cependant, de sa bouche de fraise / En se tordant ainsi qu'un serpent sur la braise" (1-2), become Swinburne's Dolores, with her "Red mouth like a venomous flower" (*Poems* 178), and whose "lips full of lust and of laughter," are "Curled snakes that are fed from my breast" (179). Humbert, quizzing Lolita about her escapades at Camp Q, is asking Swinburne's question: "Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores, / When desire took thee first by the throat?" (179). John Hollander, in his review for the *Partisan Review* in 1956, comments that these references combine to form an image of "one fair and nasty nymph" (83).

This "fair and nasty nymph" also has her precursors in the writings of both Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola who conjured infantilised *femmes fatales* as a blasphemy against Balzac's ideal infantilised child-like woman Pauline, for example. Humbert, an ardent disciple of Flaubert, is hardly an adulterous Emma Bovary on a shopping spree, as Pifer would suggest. He is more akin to Matho, the lovesick foreign barbarian who falls victim to Flaubert's young snake-maiden of ancient, decadent Carthage in the pseudo-historical novel *Salammbô* (1862). When trying on Humbert's gifts at the hotel, The Enchanted Hunters, Lolita wraps herself in "the slow snake of a brilliant belt" (*Lolita* 120). Snake-like, she "uncoils herself tableward" (214) while reaching for bananas, a most exotic fruit. Humbert's fetishistic gaze at Lolita's "dust-powdered ankle" and the "glistening tracery of down on her forearm" (41) transforms him into Flaubert's hapless Herod mesmerised by the movements of the infantile Salomé in the short story "Herodias" (1877). Humbert watches Lolita and confesses, "Every movement she made in the dappled sun plucked at the most secret and sensitive chord of my abject body" (41). Herod, likewise, catches a glimpse of Salomé's "bare arm" as it emerges from under a curtain, "a delicious young arm which might have been modelled in ivory by Polycletus. There was grace in its slight awkwardness as it wavered in the air to pick up a tunic left behind on a stool near the wall" ("Herodias" 160). It is the slight awkwardness that Humbert finds equally appealing in the "tart grace" of Lolita's "coltish subteens" (*Lolita* 49). Flaubert's Salomé has a childish lisp, and even momentarily forgets her lines after her castrating dance. She is simultaneously a child, a seducer, a destroyer, and a pawn in Herodias's political machinations.

Lolita is figured as the ultimate image of temptation and transgression, and she is thus likened to the mythical Eve. This new Eve, however, wears lipstick while holding a "beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple" (57-58). The child-Eve Humbert imagines can be likened to the child-temptress penned by the naturalist writer Emile Zola. In his decadent novel, *The Sin of Father Mouret* (1874), he could not resist creating a "mythopoeic nymphet" (*Lolita* 186) who, with naturally blossoming charms, seduces a priest. Father Mouret, as Humbert would say, is "as helpless as Adam at the preview of early oriental history, miraged in his apple orchard" (71). "Innocent," virginal, sixteen year-old Albine is a *petite*-Eve described as "still bathed in childhood," but "as supple as a snake" (*The Sin of Father Mouret* 122). Albine spends her days in Paradou, an unusual garden that is no innocent Arcadia, but a veritable brothel of blossoms and shrubbery that are likened to a maelstrom of heaving female flesh.

These innocent seductresses and infantilised *femmes fatales* of the nineteenth century in many ways prefigure the twentieth century's bubble-gum-chewing bobby-soxer. Both the infant *femme fatale* and Lolita are figurations of the feminine that are consistently displaced from domestic realms and social constructs; their milieu is one of decadence; and in their displacement they function as both the transgressive and the transgressor. Hollander notes, "The not-quite-teen-age-girl herself, of course, providing her learned lover with duties involving the procurement of sundaes and movie magazines, is the only plausible modern *femme fatale*" (83). Humbert's "passion-love" for this bobby-soxer *femme fatale*, his archaic literary trope of transgression, as Trilling explains, requires that he style himself as "a sick man, a *patient*" (97). The object of passion-love, to whom the lover must submit himself, is "his *mistress*" and he is "her *servant*, even her *slave*, he gloried in her *power* over him and expected that she would make him suffer, that she would be *cruel*" (97). To defamiliarise and thus renew these literary clichés, Nabokov had not only to create a "sick man," but an object of desire with all the necessary social taboos to produce the requisite anguish, tears and sobs. Lolita, the taboo American pre-teen, is transformed by anachronistic Humbert into his dominatrix, his childish but castrating Salomé, and the archetypal temptress, Eve. Only a pervert with a pornographic imagination, it seems, could so thoroughly besmirch the concept of "child worship."

Humbert's appeals to the codes of literary clichés and stereotypical *femmes fatales* would seem to fall flat without the foreign, bewildering spectacle of American culture. As I noted previously, readers were confronted by a "not-so-innocent" girl, as well as a social milieu that, when filtered through Humbert's prism, was equally "not-so-innocent." The deft merging of the new species of the feminine—the almost, then eventual, teenage girl—with the *femme fatale*, and replacing the spectacle of the *femme fatale*'s decadent milieu with the elaborate visual spectacle of American consumer culture produces an entirely new language for contemporary popular culture. As Nabokov noted in his afterword, he needed "an exhilarating milieu." And for Nabokov, "Nothing is more exhilarating than philistine vulgarity" (315). Eric Rothstein, in his article, "*Lolita*: Nymphet at Normal School," noting the "philistine vulgarity" of Lolita herself, comments, "Bobby-soxer Dolores styles herself with the detail and generality of mass culture, from an anywhere somewhere, whence or whither no one knows. Her New-World ideals fix only on a synchrony of movie stars, jukeboxes, and the right sneakers, sandals, and loafers" (28). In what follows, I examine some of the codes of visual culture that are brought to bear on Lolita's representation. Humbert makes several references to mass culture, employing its apparatuses and its visual displays, but gives it all a decadent *fin-de-siècle* twist.

III. Lolita: The Visual Phenomenon

> **Sex goddesses, road travel, fact and photo, past and present—it's *Lolita.* (Rothstein 34)**
>
> **Ich bin die fesche Lola. (*Der blaue Engel*, dir. von Sternberg)**
>
> **Recently I was shown an advert in an American rag offering a life size Lolita doll with 'French and Greek apertures'. (Nabokov, *Selected Letters* 558)**

Humbert's attempts to render the mutable nymphet into something more permanent requires that he be not only a literary critic and writer, but an art historian and visual artist, analysing and utilising their "secret of durable pigments" (*Lolita* 309).[16] Humbert's durable pigments however, are similar to the pigments that *fin-de-siècle* visual artists used in their depictions of *femmes fatales.* One specific instance in the novel is exemplary of the kind of visual transgression that Humbert performs with his ardent desiring gaze. This remarkable moment occurs in a schoolroom at, notably, Beardsley School for girls. After a particularly difficult interview with the headmistress Pratt (the topic of which happened to be Lolita's sexuality), Humbert finds Lolita seated in one of the classrooms. The entire scene occurs in the presence of "a sepia print of Reynolds's 'Age of Innocence' above the chalkboard [...]" (198). Humbert also takes note of another girl with "a porcelain-white neck" and "wonderful platinum hair," a girl "who is absolutely lost to the world and interminably winding a soft curl around one finger" (198). Humbert, having "to take advantage of a combination" that he "knew would never occur again," has Lolita put her "inky, chalky, red-knuckled hand under the desk" for which she receives "sixty-five cents and permission to participate in the school play" (198). What occurs is a literal, and starkly visual, realisation of Lolita's fluid two-fold nature: her "tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity" (44).

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[16] As both writer and art critic, Humbert resembles the Victorian author and art critic John Ruskin who was in love with an eleven-year-old girl named Rose La Touche. See Bill Delaney's article, "Nabokov's *Lolita,*" for the various allusions to Ruskin and Rose in Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Humbert's perfect moment employs a two-fold visual style complete with two painters: Sir Joshua Reynolds, who visually defined the "tender dreamy childishness" of the archetypal asexual child at the birth of Romanticism; and Aubrey Beardsley, the artist most closely associated with decadent *fin-de-siècle* visual culture, and whose speciality was the "eerie vulgarity" of depraved pubescent-like females. The other girl in the classroom closely resembles the inviolate and unconscious girl in Reynolds's painting, with her porcelain skin and soft curls, dreamily unaware of adult life, and therefore "innocent." Lolita, by contrast, with her "inky" hands, has stepped out of one of Beardsley's ink illustrations of depraved femininity. As Rampton notes, the scene encourages the reader to become aware of "human life and fictional analogues, the consequences of desire along with the devices of the novelist, the defilement of a precious image which is magnified by a subtle allusion" (107).

The fictional analogues are of particular interest, for they establish the two dichotomous visual fictions of femininity by which Lolita's situation is rendered ambiguous. One visual fiction is that which was executed at the birth of Romanticism, and which depicted fragile, clean well-scrubbed innocence. The second is the visual incarnation of perverse femininity as an emblem of nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Reynolds's *The Age of Innocence* (ca. 1788), which inspired a stream of similarly fashioned nineteenth-century paintings of ideal childhood, depicts a child's body that visually and compositionally denies all aspects of the adult world. She is nestled in with nature, and her asexuality is figured by plump clean hands that are delicately held to her chest, her gaze directed to an off-frame space. The figure of the girl is presented as a passive, non-threatening, object of the gaze. The quiet, reading girl with her soft curls, and her fictional analogue, the girl in *The Age of Innocence*, constitute what Molnar called the "ethical ideal." Lolita's fictional analogue is not a passive asexual object, but a figure from a Beardsley drawing; that is, a blasphemy of the "ethical ideal." Lolita's negotiations for the price of a sexual favour under the desk renders her active, knowing, and conscious of the adult world. Yet it also ambiguously renders her as a "part of a study of pornography, how power and desire instrumentalize people" (Rampton 107).

It can be argued that Humbert is not alone in the visual defilement of a precious image, for the sepia print hanging in the "smelly" (*Lolita* 198) Beardsley classroom is one already defiled by mechanical reproduction; that is, it has lost its "aura" as Walter Benjamin would posit in his influential article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin claims that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (221). Reynolds's visual fiction of inviolate childhood innocence is drained of its peach and cream tones, which are then replaced by the sepia tones of a printing process. Reynolds's vision is an old world tradition of ideal girlhood mechanically reproduced in America, an "exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud [...]" (*Lolita* 44), Humbert would say.

It is this similar technological defilement of childhood that contributes to the anxiety that circulates around the photographic image, especially the advertising image, that seems to visually rob childhood of its innocence. Paul Giles argues, in his article, "Virtual Eden," that Humbert's running commentary on the virtuality of Lolita's middle-American popular culture milieu, and her status as a voracious consumer, mirrors the "sexual fetishism" implicit in advertising, "a mechanism which locks Humbert's relationship with his stepdaughter into an affair of iconography rather than interiority" (48). Not surprisingly, mechanically inclined Humbert, as if in an attempt to iconographically fix his nymphet with the apparatus of American consumer culture, takes unsatisfactory snapshots of Lolita to serve as little fetishes, which he then later burns. What he wishes he had done, in order to restore her "aura," was mechanically reproduce Lolita on celluloid.

In his search for the perfect language to describe his Lolita, from the books available in the prison library, he turns his attention to "a comparatively recent" edition of "*Who's Who in the Limelight*—actors, producers, playwrights, and shots of static scenes" (*Lolita* 31). American culture is movie culture, and Lolita's relationship to film gives her the power to visually eclipse not only innocent Annabel Leigh, posed in Humbert's out-of-focus vague recollection, but all literary prototypes as well. When Humbert differentiates the "two kinds of visual memory"—one, a skilfully recreated image experienced "in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open," and the other, when "you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colours" (11)—he is marking the difference between literature and film respectively. His Lolita, this instantly evoked movie-child, is quite different from his skilfully recreated literary image.

Perhaps it is because Lolita is such a "modern child, an avid reader of movie magazines, an expert in dream-slow close-ups" (49), that when Humbert attempts to describe his "raffish lass" (163), he uses numerous film metaphors and the language of the cinematic apparatus. As Elizabeth Power has demonstrated in her article, "The Cinematic Art of Nympholepsy," Humbert figuratively transforms himself into both a movie camera, thus recording Lolita's image, as well as a movie projector (107-109). Humbert, approaching Lolita from behind, describes his "arms and legs" as "convex surfaces between which—rather than upon which—I slowly progressed by some neutral means of locomotion [...]" (*Lolita* 54). He also becomes a movie projector in order to "reel off" (41) his memories of her. As Rothstein notes, Humbert's prismatic gaze is both "hot, ripe, *fin-de-siècle* silliness," coupled with the "fatal degradations from Weimar filmdom" (34). Humbert's cinematic language is, for one, German Expressionist, that "dash of the Danube" (*Lolita* 9) he inherited from his father. He may have described Charlotte as a "weak solution of Marlene Dietrich" (37), but it is Lolita who is "Lola in slacks" (9). Humbert has cast himself as "a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood" (39) parading before Lolita's gaze, but he desires to be a submissive Professor Unrath under the heartless gaze of a *kleine fesche* Lola Lola.

Humbert's Weimar movies, when they take to the road in an American car, become distinctly 1940s *film noir*, complete with the kitsch of roadside America.[17] Appel, in an outstanding comparison of *Lolita* and *film noir* in his book, *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, notes that Nabokov favours "sinister effects" in his novel, and creates a "veritable dark cinema." Appel concludes that "the most evocative aural and visual descriptions in *Lolita* are in the manner of classic nineteen-forties *films noirs* [...]" (195). The novel is full of rain, wind, dreary horizons, the elements of tawdry roadside America (complete with cheap motels, bill-board advertisements, tourist traps, quick-eat diners, gas station restrooms, and zigzagging flies), and shadowy figures like Clare Quilty. *Lolita* presents a quotidian world of criminality, obsession and despair. Its narrative strategy resembles that of a dime-store detective novel, combined with the voice of a criminal's jailhouse confession. While flipping through the 1947 *Briceland Gazette*, before his murder of Quilty and subsequent incarceration, Humbert notes that *Brute Force* (1947)—a most *noir* prison film—is playing at the local movie theatre (*Lolita* 262). And the dying nympholept, in his tomb-like cell, relates his sorry fate like a defeated and dying Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity* (1940).

Of course, Humbert's cinematic fantasy is a little more lurid in its scenes of masochistic degradation than any film by Fritz Lang or *film noir*. Appel notes that

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[17] Elizabeth Freeman, in her article, "Honeymoon With a Stranger," connects the notion of road travel in *Lolita* to two distinctly American tropes, that of the honeymoon and the cross-country family vacation. Nabokov transforms these cultural pastimes into what Freeman calls the "pedophilic picaresque," and with literary origins in American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Mayne Reid. Because there is a distinctly *noir* quality to the road trips taken by Humbert and Lolita, we can speculate that *film noir* also invokes similar tropes of road travel in order to subvert the notion of security in both marriage and family.

Nabokov's work "abounds in images and scenes that are cinematic by design" (195). One example of Humbert's cinematic designs occurs when he watches Lolita playing tennis. Through his cinematic prism, tennis is transformed into a euphemistic spectacle of Lolita's "geometry of basic reality" (*Lolita* 231). He wishes he could have immortalised the "clean resounding crack of her golden whip," her "spanking pace" that unfortunately lacked any "twist or sting." He wishes he would have had "all her strokes, all her enchantments, immortalized in segments of celluloid" (232). Humbert's cinematic designs are adaptations of what Susan Sontag, in her essay, "The Pornographic Imagination," calls "the 'libertine' potboilers" (147) of early nineteenth-century France. Though Nabokov in his afterword disparaged "modern" pornography for its "copulation of clichés," he expressed admiration for older pornographic traditions that merged "deliberate lewdness" with "flashes of comedy" as well as "the verve of a fine poet in a wanton mood" (*Lolita* 313). The language spun around Lolita's body is thus also inflected with the clichés of decorous obscenity from the European Enlightenment (Giles 58).

Humbert's prism, his gaze at Lolita and her taboo sexuality, places her within numerous systems of representation. Lolita becomes the bad girl of nineteenth-century children's didactic fiction, as well as the Dickensian-styled wayward and corrupted girl. She is a *femme fatale* from poems by Baudelaire and Swinburne, as well as an "*enfant charmante et fourbe*" (*Lolita* 20) from Flaubert's and Zola's decadent novels; she is a *film noir femme fatale* and a whip-wielding dominatrix from pornography. She is also a bubble-gum-chewing product of American popular commodity culture, "the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster"

(148). By invoking multiple systems of clichés and stereotypes, Nabokov's novel allows both high-brow and low-brow to exist simultaneously. "The problematical nature of *Lolita*'s status as highbrow literature" (57), as Paul Giles calls it, resides in the way the novel's literary language is as "wayward" as Lolita's representations; that is, the language spills outside of what is deemed to be proper canonical literary language.

Like Nabokov's novel, the Lolita Phenomenon of late-twentieth-century culture, even in its most lurid form, invokes and reworks the *femme fatale*, especially in her infantilised form, from the late-nineteenth century in answer to larger social anxieties. That Nabokov has spun such a provocative web of allusions and devices, gleaned from literary and visual culture, from the high-brow to the low-brow, around Lolita's body allows the Lolita figure to readily find her place in several other areas of contemporary culture. Popular culture lets this Lolita into the sanitised space of childhood precisely because Lolita, fey nymphet and child (femme) fatale, provokes questions and concerns about the erotic subjectivity of young girls. Whiting, who examines the larger cultural problematic of Lolita's sexuality, points out that Humbert's difficulty, and ultimately the reader's difficulty, arises from "the resistance to examining the erotic subjectivity of children [...] implicit in age-of-consent laws both then and now" (842). Because Humbert must construct his own sexuality as passive and submissive before his erotic objects, he "endows his nymphets with a certain agency; through it they are capable, indeed given to, acting upon Humbert, bewitching him, mounting an assault against which he is defenseless. Which is to say they have, among other things, a subjectivity and an ability to return—or not—his desiring gaze" (842). Humbert realises and, like the reader, tries to disavow the fact that Lolita "is a creature who can assume the subject position and look upon him, a creature capable of desire" (Whiting 846). Which also means that Lolita, like his first wife Valeria, can, and indeed does, desire someone else. Nabokov's novel is challenging, and Lolita's ambiguity complex, because, as Pifer argues, Nabokov manages to restore "sexual vitality to the image of childhood" (76).

Paglia comments that the novel *Lolita* "was like a hand grenade thrown into the middle of the 1950s" ("Lolita Unclothed" 159) that blew apart the unexamined myths of not only family life, but constructions of ideal girlhood. In the novel, we find Lolita reworking the Girl Scout's motto: "I fill my life with worthwhile deeds such as—well, never mind what. My duty is—to be useful. I am a friend to male animals. I obey orders. I am cheerful. That was another police car. I am thrifty and I am absolutely filthy in thought, word and deed" (114). Lolita's verbal parody of ideal girlhood discloses more than mere childish prattle. She invokes the good girl who engages in "worthwhile deeds," who has a "duty," who must "obey," and who must be "cheerful"; in other words, female sexuality as tame and obedient. She also invokes the bad girl who has undisclosed secrets, who is a "friend to male animals," and who is "absolutely filthy" in thought and behaviour. The larger social question that Lolita's subversive motto provokes is how to frame the sexuality of young girls; that is, how to contain, control and channel it into socially acceptable patterns. "That was another police car," Lolita says. As we will see in later chapters, "policing" girlhood, and constantly being "shocked" by what that policing reveals, is one of society's ardent pastimes. In the following chapter, I examine how girlhood has been figured in painting, from the good "Angel in the House," to the wayward "Salome." With these two iconographic traditions in mind, I turn my attention to those artists who have articulated the fluid and unstable nature of child (femmes) fatales. Paintings of girls, as we shall see, are not only portraits, but personifications of cultural values.

Chapter Three: Visual Transgressions

> **Had I been a painter, had the management of The Enchanted Hunters lost its mind one summer day and commissioned me to redecorate their dining room with murals of my own making, this is what I might have thought up [...]. (*Lolita* 134)**

I.

There are many ways of imagining nymphets and baby coquettes, as Humbert Humbert knows only too well. Jennifer Shute, in her article, "So Nakedly Dressed," notes that in Nabokov's literary art there are numerous appeals to the codes of visual culture including the nude, striptease, photography and painting (543). That Nabokov employs the codes of visual culture to construct Lolita as a child (femme) fatale is not surprising; *Lolita* is not only a story of sexual transgression, but a story of visual transgression. As we saw in the previous chapter, Humbert's gaze at Lolita's pubescent body transforms her into a sublime work of visual art in which she functions as an object of his erotic desire, and as a source of his own feelings of dread.

In what follows, I will explore the ways in which nymphets have been visualised on canvas in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. I begin by comparing two turn-of-the-nineteenth century paintings that are polarised depictions of young girls. By doing so, I show the two faces of femininity that are ideologically and iconographically the loci for two divergent social attitudes, attitudes that have remained a significant part of the contemporary concept of girlhood. The angel–whore dichotomy that informed nineteenth-century representations of adult femininity also applied to the "overarching category childhood" which, as art historian David Lubin points out, in *Picturing a Nation*, was divided into "the innately innocent versus the innately depraved [...]" (223). Furthermore, any painting of a girl-child has the power to reproduce not only an actual girl, but an ideology. Art historian Marcia Pointon, in her book, *Hanging the Head*, notes that paintings of children function for "ulterior reasons," such as the personification of cultural values, and "produce a set of explicit and implicit meanings" (178). These "ulterior reasons" are most evident in images of girls where, moreso than in images of boys, much cultural investment exists.

With this elision between portraiture and the ideologies of genre painting in mind, I then turn my attention to artists who have produced ambiguous and provocative images of girlhood. In each instance, the child (femme) fatale, like the *femme fatale*, is informed by the "allegorizing structures" that typically operate in paintings of both women and children (Pointon 184). The late-nineteenth-century British artist Philip Wilson Steer, for example, came under the spell of a twelve-year-old studio model named Rose Pettigrew. Steer's subject matter, a seven-year-long romance in oils, and his strategy for depicting his model's loveliness, coincides with the increasing eroticisation of young girls in Victorian England. In Germany, Die Brücke artists found that the pubescent girl's body was not only apt subject matter for their early-twentieth-century avant-garde aspirations, but served as a symbolic critique of modernity. Finally, the provocative painter Balthus, a contemporary (and favourite) of Nabokov, perfected the art of painting languishing nymphets in disturbingly erotic realms. This chapter will follow a two-fold line of inquiry: first, by examining the visual rhetoric employed in images of the child (femme) fatale, and second, by subjecting these images to a larger contextual analysis, we can disclose the nexus of social anxieties that have been inscribed on the bodies of young girls. Paintings of young girls become a mode of social surveillance, which then discloses and visualises either reinforcement of, or disruptions in, dominant ideology. The visual disruptions, as we will see in later chapters, become significant aspects of the Lolita Phenomenon in late-twentieth-century popular culture.

II. Virgins and Vixens

> **We manage this hocus-pocus by switching the costume we put on the child: idealized angels are made possible by matching devils. And it's simple economy to use the same body for both parts: the dream child becomes the demon. (Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence* 140)**

The Lolita Phenomenon of the late twentieth century is, like the rise of the *femme fatale* in the late nineteenth century, almost exclusively a visual phenomenon that traverses both high and popular culture. Lolitas in contemporary fashion advertising and film are not simply a product of Nabokov's novel, but a continuation of images of the child (femme) fatale from turn-of-the-nineteenth century visual culture. These child (femmes) fatales derive their provocative power through a process that undermines the visual habits that have been acquired through almost two centuries of "imagining" innocent childhood. Visual culture provides an especially powerful form of provocation and transgression because the ideal image of girlhood innocence and purity was initially made secure by the visual arts.[18] Since the birth of Romanticism, the body of the young girl has been particularly privileged subject matter, serving equally well as an emblem of cultural optimism, or as an emblem of cultural pessimism. Images of cultural optimism rely heavily on an iconography of innocence and purity so frequently associated with young girls. For contemporary culture, as for the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, the preponderance of visual images of less-than-ideal girlhood is expressive of a sense that culture is in a state of crisis. The transformation of the image of girlhood from the ideal innocent to the not-so-innocent is due, in part, to the sense that culture itself is no longer innocent or ideal. In other words, the "nymphet syndrome" of contemporary culture can be termed a reformulated "*fin-de-siècle* syndrome."

Art historian Anne Higonnet points out in her book, *Pictures of Innocence*, that paintings of sweet and benign childhood executed at the birth of Romanticism "captured the modern western visual imagination and became the foundation of what we assume childhood looks like" (23). Expressive of what values were at work in imagining the girl-child as the bearer of social optimism, Thomas C. Gotch's *The Child Enthroned* (ca. 1894) (fig. 3:1) is the perfect visualisation of nineteenth-century "child worship" in its most literal sense. This painting participates wholeheartedly, and unambiguously, in numerous genre paintings of modern household Madonnas

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[18] As Higonnet explains, "Visual fictions played a special role in consolidating the modern definition of childhood, a role which became increasingly important over time. To a great extent, childhood innocence was considered an attribute of the child's body, both because the child's body was supposed to be naturally innocent of adult sexuality, and because the child's mind was supposed to begin blank. Innocence therefore lent itself to visual representation because the immediate visibility of pictures has always had a privileged ability to shape our understanding of our bodies, our physical selves. The same modern period that created the ideal of childhood innocence, moreover, placed its faith in visual evidence" (8-9).

Page 63 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:1, Thomas C. Gotch's painting, *The Child Enthroned* (ca. 1894); rpt. in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 190.

and holy motherhood.[19] Gotch's painting, like many pictorial depictions of feminine virtue, uses religious iconography (in this case, sixth-century Byzantine splendour) to conceptualise purity and innocence. The girl's domesticated, asexual nature is articulated by an inviolate and self-enclosed body: she is a solemn, upright frontal figure draped in an elaborately patterned costume. She is as grand and imposing as any earthly or unearthly sovereign, timeless and immortal. Like any one of Father Mouret's Virgin Mary statues in Zola's novel, *The Sin of Father Mouret*, she is the "stern virgin" (78) as well as "the prodigy of eternal chastity" (95).

It is significant that, in Gotch's painting, the "child" to be "enthroned" is a girl rather than a boy. What is implied is what this girl will be when she is an adult: a perfectly pure woman, a full-grown nurturing Madonna, yet one who remains "ignorant of the flesh" (95), as Father Mouret would say. A pure and uncorrupted girlhood is imagined as a necessary precondition for woman's, and by extension society's, well-being. Furthermore, because Gotch's imperious little figure returns the gaze of the viewer, she acts as both an earthly and heavenly icon whose visage offers a standard for moral hygiene. Gorham notes in her book, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, that "a young girl could represent the quintessential angel in the house. Unlike an adult woman, a girl could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity"

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[19] For a discussion of the ideological implications of this holy iconography in the representation of feminine virtue, see Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*, especially the chapter, "Raptures of Submission: The Shopkeeper's Soul Keeper and the Cult of the Household Nun" (pp. 3-24). Dijkstra later comments, "From the wife as household nun to the image of 'The Child Enthroned,' as Thomas Gotch inevitably came to see the ideal of childhood purity, was not a great step" (190).

(7). As a powerful metaphor for society's own conscience, it is this girl-child who acts as protectress of social salvation.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, however, discourses on social stability and moral hygiene reached a level of heightened urgency. As a result, society was often subjected to vigilant, often fruitless, cleansing crusades. The perceived threat to patriarchal stability was depicted in a stream of paintings that featured the "woman-gone-bad" *femme fatale*. For visual culture, as Edward Marsicano argues in *The Femme Fatale Myth*, the *femme fatale* "became a blatant emblem of all that was wrong with society" (21). Alongside these images of corrupt, devouring, chaotic womanhood, malefactors of the female sex were also imagined as young girls. Consider, for example, Edouard Toudouze's painting, *Salome Triumphant* (ca. 1886) (fig. 3:2). As in Gotch's painting, the girl is enthroned. It seems, however, that Gotch's good girl has grown weary of Byzantine virginity and has assumed the pose of a languid harlot. Her destructive, chaotic sexuality is articulated by a body that sprawls: Toudouze's young vixen reclines on her throne, her lithe body as supple as the snake-like bracelet encircling her arm. Her ferocious appetites are emphasised by the snarling feline heads on the arms of the throne.

Salome, the most popular *femme fatale* figure in the late nineteenth century, suggested the languid, but rebellious, exotic colonised realms with their barbaric savagery and sensuality.[20] She was viewed as the ultimate oriental harlot whose

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[20] Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, notes the "almost uniform association between the Orient and sex" which is "a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient [...] Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate [...]" (188).

Page 66 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:2, Edouard Toudouze's painting, *Salome Triumphant* (ca. 1886); rpt. in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 383.

lascivious loins led to Herod's momentary abdication of power and, of course, John the Baptist's beheading. Toudouze's Salome reclines on Herod's vacated throne, one leg dangling, as if about to kick the Baptist's head out of the way. She fixedly gazes at the viewer with a pixyish glee that indicates a conscious knowledge of her power as seductress and destroyer. In this respect, she prefigures Oscar Wilde's theatrical version of a vicious Salome, that "daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom!" (*Salomé* 28) who quite literally lusts for the Baptist's head. Finally, as a symbol of the nineteenth-century woman's desire for emancipation, Salome represents its vile results; men's head's—those repositories of reason and social progress—would end up like that of the Baptist, as a bloody and silent cranial mass on a charger. Toudouze's Salome presents the viewer with an exhaustive display of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties; her head is indeed wreathed with every imaginable *fleur du mal*. She is the naughty virgin girl to the good virgin girl enthroned in Gotch's painting. She is the fictional standard by which society can measure the depth of its decadence and degeneration.

The visual strategy in depicting, and thus discerning, the degenerate *femme fatale* in the late nineteenth century was to iconographically project several forms of otherness onto the image of woman (Stott 31-36), as did Toudouze when he painted his version of Salome. Salome's body is traversed by an exotic foreignness, a languid sensuality, and a malevolent perversity. Even though she appears to exist outside of society, safely located in a remote time and place, Patrick Bade points out in his essay, "Art and Degeneration: Visual Icons of Corruption," that a recurring theme in the visual arts was the decline of ancient civilisations "corrupted by wealth and luxury" (231). Bade goes on to note that "parallels were frequently drawn between nineteenth-century Europe" and these imaginary scenes of past social degeneration (231). Salome, with her exotic foreignness and undomesticated female sexuality, functioned as a cautionary tale about the degenerative potential of the modern European woman and, by extension, society itself.

These two paintings do more than just visualise nice girls versus nasty girls. As art historian Edgar Wind has stressed, paintings of young girls create "an interplay between the two stages of the subject's life, in which the condition of the grown up person is projected back into the mind of the child whose pose and expression prophetically, as it were, hint at her future situation" (qtd. in Pointon 181). This future situation may have two possibilities: either an upright Madonna or a recumbent Salome, a poem by Coventry Patmore or a story of decapitation by Oscar Wilde. Then, as now, images of benign, vacuous, heavenly little girls served to reinscribe a social order deemed necessary for a healthy culture. The potential Salome becomes a source of anxiety precisely because the "wayward girl" who appears to be heading toward deviant behaviour disrupts the morally acceptable role for women in Western culture, and thus poses a threat to patriarchal society. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, artists have created images of young girls as potential mistresses, exotic prostitutes, and habitual sensualists who are far removed from those innocent household angels. If Humbert Humbert had been given a paintbrush, he may have produced a parade of these "precocious pet[s]" (*Lolita* 49), "little wench[s]" (55), and "vagrant schoolgirl[s]" (161).

III. Philip Wilson Steer: Seaside Salomes and Victorian Vixens

> **It all seemed very pure, this exploration of the soft vulnerability of childhood, very "ideal"—but it is obvious that these men were playing with the fire that turns innocence into sin. [...] one pose logically led to another. (Dijkstra 190)**

In late-nineteenth-century England, Lolita's precursors emerged in both high and popular visual culture where spectacles of enchanting and enslaving young females paraded across salon walls and pages of magazines. Notably, this interplay between enchantment and enslavement animated the artistic output of British painter Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), and pretty Rose Pettigrew was, we can say, his "Lolita." This vivacious, precocious twelve-year old studio model, and the only romantic interest on record for this life-long bachelor, was to hold Steer in such thraldom that his painting style changed in order to explore her particular charms, and to thematise his peculiar fascination. Art historian Bruce Laughton notes in his book, *Philip Wilson Steer*, that Rose coincided quite nicely with "his predilection for thin, auburn-haired or red-haired schoolgirls" (43), a predilection, it seems, that was enthusiastically shared by most Victorians. When she broke off their relationship, his frustrated sexual energies were poured out in poorly executed, quasi-pornographic paintings featuring absurdly ribald nude female bodies. Apparently, Steer had as much difficulty "handling" the fleshy adult female body as did Humbert Humbert. In eventual sexual resignation, it seems, Steer spent the remainder of his career turning out limp watercolour landscapes.

Steer would not merit the obligatory nod in art history that he does were it not for the fact that he was one of the first British artists, along with Walter R. Sickert, to turn to French Impressionism for stylistic inspiration at a time when Impressionism was derided in England as a rather dubious, if not outright silly, French style.[21] He wrote no manifestos, made no public artistic proclamations, caused no scandals, and generally received negative reviews whenever he exhibited his paintings. He is now most remembered for his Impressionist-influenced seaside scenes executed between 1885 and 1892. In these seascapes, young girls frolic, wade in the waves, watch passing yachts, and play knucklebones. Fraser Harrison, in his study of Victorian mores, *The Dark Angel*, succinctly summarises the appeal these little girls held for Steer:

> Because they are young and innocent their behaviour on the beach is not expected to match the strict decorum sustained by their mothers and older sisters; they tuck up their skirts, disdain their stockings, show their legs, flaunt their bloomers, stick out their bottoms as they bend to pick up a shell, and generally display themselves provocatively. (136)

Steer's frolicsome nymphets seem to flicker and shimmer in pure, bright, sunshine-lit hues. His mercurial Victorian sirens are as ineffable and as fleeting as mirages, and are to be voyeuristically observed from afar.

While Harrison proposes that Steer's fascination with these lovely seaside adolescents was part of his own, personal, exploration of his Victorian (and, therefore, repressed) sexuality, I would add that the Steer's beach nymphets visually participate in the increasing spectacularisation and eroticisation of girls in late-nineteenth-century British culture. What came to be known as the "seaside girl" was, according to Thomas Richards in *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, "the most modern form of spectacle devised by the late-Victorian commodity culture, and has proved to be the most lasting" (240). These lovely seaside girls, the forerunners of modern Lolitas in advertising, struck provocative poses in advertisements for products such as "Beetham's Glyc'rine and Cucumber" and "Beecham's Pills." The seaside girl was designed to be the ultimate consumer, while her body was designed to be consumable.[22]

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[21] Laughton touches on the British resistance to Impressionism, especially in the chapter titled "Walberswick 1888-94: Steer and French Impressionism" (pp. 14-31).

What images of seaside girls signalled, and what was effectively deployed in a number of advertising images, was the seaside resort as a site of fantasy, and a sexualised space of leisure, where prohibitions concerning dress and behaviour were temporarily suspended. It was at the beach that "the body of the adolescent or prepubescent girl became a cultural ideal [...]" (Richards 228), not to mention a site of erotic fantasy for everyone, including the clergy. The Rev. Francis Kilvert, for example, could barely contain his prose as he observed a naked young girl on the beach, noting, in his diary, the girl's "supple slender waist, the gentle dawn and tender swell of the bosom and the budding breasts, the graceful rounding of the delicately beautiful limbs and above all the soft exquisite curves of the rosy dimpled bottom and broad white thighs" (qtd. in Richards 227). The good Reverend's "My Secret Life" observations are not unlike those of the young Humbert during his sexual awakening at a luxurious seaside resort on the Riviera. Humbert's first love, Annabel

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[22] In these advertisements, as Richards explains, "If sitting, she strikes, in a swimsuit with low bodice and exposed legs, a cheesecake pose; if strolling, she reaches out in the conventional posture of Eve; if swimming, she floats exposed to the waist under the scrutiny of bobbing male heads" (231).

Leigh, is the quintessential eroticised seaside girl, eating her *chocolat glacé*, smelling of musky Spanish toilet powder, and provocatively displaying her bare shoulders and lovely "seaside limbs" (*Lolita* 15).

We can infer that Steer's gaze at the pubescent seaside girl was due to a sexual predilection that was visually informed by the proliferation of eroticised images of young girls in both high and popular culture. Steer was painting images of girlhood in a milieu where commodity culture and high art intersected in a most direct way. Steer was also painting in an artistic environment that saw the first transformations of the Romantic image of childhood by artists such as John Everett Millais (1829-96), a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In Steer's time, Millais's speciality had become painting wildly popular images of Romantic childhood that pandered to public taste and mass marketing. His painting titled *Cherry Ripe* (1879), for example, a reworked version of Sir Joshua Reynolds's idealised *Penelope Bootheby* (1788), was commissioned by the weekly London newspaper, *The Graphic*, and reproduced as a mezzotint centrefold. Millais's subtly parodic images of ideal Romantic childhood delicately (and humorously) began to undermine the Romantic image of sexless, benign girlhood found in Reynolds's earlier paintings. In fact, Pamela Tamarkin Reis, in her article, "Victorian Centerfold," argues that the popularity of Millais's *Cherry Ripe* was due "to its pronounced pedophilic appeal" (201). Unlike Reynolds's portrait of the shy and modest Penelope Bootheby, Millais's *Cherry Ripe* depicts "a not so benign presence whose characteristics are erotic display and sexual aggressiveness" (201); in other words, a "ripe" little girl. Though Reis's analysis has been criticised for its somewhat excessive language,[23] what becomes apparent is that representations of young girls' bodies often entailed the addition of sensual, if not outright sexy, visual codes that are now all too familiar in contemporary advertising.

During this period of transformation in the image of ideal girlhood, Rose Pettigrew emerged as Steer's demon nymphet from among the throng of innocent seaside girls and ripening cherries. Rose's autobiographical essay, written in 1947 when she was 71 years old, is a unique document, for in it a former studio model articulates her relationship with various artists, including Millais and Steer. Her essay is more a self-portrait than, as she titles it, "Memories of Philip Wilson Steer." What is interesting to note is how her self-portrait conforms to a sense of herself as a spectacle, as an object of erotically coded "ways of seeing," to use John Berger's phrase. Rose begins by elaborating how she and her two older sisters came to be studio models in London. Because of their widowed mother's dire financial situation, Rose and her sisters were employed in what was then considered a dubious profession, if not an outright form of prostitution. That young Rose Pettigrew posed for Millais is not surprising, as she would have fulfilled Millais's requirements for any number of his paintings. Rose's own catalogue of her physical features, including "curly bright gold hair," a "rose-leaf complexion," a "cupid's bow mouth," and "beautiful hands" (Pettigrew 114), conforms to the then popular image of Romantic girlhood.

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[23] The excessiveness of Reis's interpretation has been challenged by Robert M. Polhemus in his article, "John Millais's Children: Faith, Erotics and *The Woodman's Daughter*," especially Reis's propensity to juxtapose "the crimes of rape and child-molesting with the figure and subject of this painting" which "may seem a bit of over-wrought sensationalism" (443).

Though Rose portrays herself as a curly-headed and cupid-like young girl on the one hand, on the other hand she also speaks of herself as a desirable, knowing and worldly little *allumeuse*, especially in her encounter with Steer. Harrison notes that in her biographical sketch she conveys the "verve, egotism, and naivety" of her youthful self, and "ingeniously reflect[s] the priorities and preoccupations of an adolescent girl in love" (143). The only thing Harrison fails to note is that Rose was, at twelve, already able to constitute herself as a desirable object, one to be looked at by an artist or a potential lover (in Steer's case, both). Laughton is perhaps more correct when he says that "her jaunty youthfulness already carried a certain *savoir faire* by the time she met Steer" (43), as she had posed for several well-known artists such as Millais, along with James Whistler, Edward Poynter, Frederic Leighton, and Holman Hunt. Rose Pettigrew was indeed a well-versed *objet d'art*. Her relationship with Steer, moreover, was made secure by her ability to manipulate his artistic (male) gaze, and by her ability to subvert the power structure that animates the relationship between the artist and his model.

Rose was aware of the risqué nature of the studio model's status, and the prevalent myth that the female model was either the male artist's lover or a prostitute.[24] As a model, she certainly existed on the fringes of the socially acceptable, at once removed from the middle-class domestic sphere. Rather than constructing this situation as a site of shame, she felt herself at liberty to disdain the conventions of demure girlish modesty, and to behave in a "very modern" way, as she calls it (Pettigrew 119). A striking example of her "very modern" behaviour is Rose's account of how her relationship with Steer began. In 1888, when she first met "the best looking man in Chelsea" (118), she became quite determined to prove her charming attributes to this handsome older man. After clearing up a crop of pimples with her mother's home remedy, and donning her best dress, she headed straight for Steer's studio. Rose makes it perfectly clear that it was she who seduced Steer by flirting with a brand of commandeering haughtiness, provoking Steer, the besotted Solomon, to ask, "Are you the Queen of Sheba?" (118). Claiming that she was in great demand, so he had better make up his mind quickly, she boldly offered her services as a model. When Steer accepted her offer to pose for him, Rose says, "I went away thinking I'd scored well" (119).

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[24] Marsicano explains that there existed "many ways for a Victorian woman to be tagged a *femme fatale*," some of them being if she became "an actress, an artist's model, or a prostitute" (17). See Lynda Nead's *Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* for a brief discussion of the myth of the studio model as artist's mistress (pp. 50-51).

Money, however, was not necessarily what she wished to score. As if to disengage herself from a situation of economic dependence, Rose offered to pose for Steer for less than her regular fee, then eventually for no pay. By negating the economic exchange between artist and model, Rose invited the possibility of a romance. She felt herself to be his co-conspirator in matters artistic, hovered around the studio scene, and got sick drinking bad Chianti from chipped cups. She did not mind the other women who posed for commissioned portraits, "so long as he loved painting me" (120). Rose claims that Steer was as much in love with her as she with him, and at some point he had given her a carved gold ring. Later, during one of their dancing dates, she initiated an argument with him, rejected his awkward marriage proposal, and subsequently returned his ring. Though he called on her for months afterwards, she refused to see him. Judging from her recollections, what seemed to break her heart the most was that she had to part with the lovely carved gold ring.

Rose Pettigrew documented her personal relationship with Steer using pen and paper, while Steer documented his relationship with Rose using paint and canvas. On these canvases, Steer depicts the fluid and disarming power structure that animated their relationship, a power structure that is evident in Rose's memoirs. Between 1888 and 1892, Steer continued to paint his seaside scenes, as well as studies and portraits of pretty precocious Rose. After 1892, and until she severed their relationship in about 1895, he painted her exclusively. Steer's stylistic change from depersonalised depictions of coltish beach girls to much more intimately posed studio portraits and studies of Rose was no doubt due to his particular attachment to her. In the studio, Steer could painstakingly and minutely examine Rose's delicate face and gestures, while lingering over her long, lean limbs. In Steer's early paintings of Rose, he approaches his subject-matter with a degree of hesitancy, his desire cloaked in prudish visual commonplaces. In these paintings, she is posed asleep, sitting on a sofa, or holding a nosegay of jonquils; they have titles such as *The Sofa* (1889), *The Sprigged Frock* (1890), and *The Blue Dress* (1892). Here, Rose merely acts as an extension of furniture, frocks and flowers, while Steer disavows the actual subject-matter of his paintings, as even the innocent titles of his paintings indicate.

Inspired by the work of Edgar Degas in France, however, Steer realised the potential erotic tension that could be expressed by depicting the object of his desire in more private, intimate moments. Using voyeuristic representational strategies gleaned from Degas, Steer attempted to merge his idealised, unselfconscious beach nymphs—who "display themselves provocatively" (136), as Harrison noted—with a worldly girl who knew "how to pose" (Pettigrew 120). Harrison comments that Steer's new obsessive style exudes

> an uncomfortable feeling of confinement: Steer seems to have trapped his loved one in a transparent vivarium in order to submit her to an intensive examination. Once again he is the onlooker, but this time he has firmly pinned down the object of his observation; Rose will not run away across the beach or have to be replaced by surrogates during the winter months. (144)

He painted Rose as the *Girl at her toilet* (1892), a familiar Degas theme, in which Rose is seen sitting on a chair in her thin shift, her clothes tossed to one side, slightly bent over, with her long legs crossed as she slips off a shoe. Like one of Degas's dancers, her skirt flares as she does a can-can kick *à la Moulin Rouge* in a painting titled *Skirt-Dancing* (1894). In front of a full-length mirror, Rose becomes *The Mirror: Model Standing* (ca. 1894). In these paintings, the framing and point of view implicate both artist and audience in voyeuristic pleasure. Such a display of Rose's feminine nature is quite unlike the self-enclosed, heavenly image of girlhood. In fact, Rose is visually coded in a way that acts as a disclosure of young female perversity. For the late-nineteenth century eye, these visual codes were commonplace when depicting female perfidy. Rose is posed as a classic *femme fatale* caught in moments of sensuousness and narcissism: in the process of undressing, dancing like a maenad, or absorbed by her own reflection in a mirror.

Steer's sense of the danger posed by the seductive nature of this nymphet is revealed in his painting titled *Self-portrait with Model* (c.1894) (fig. 3:3), which is more of a visual confession than a self-portrait. Like Degas's painting, *The Interior* (1868)—more luridly known as *The Rape*—Steer thematises the visual relationship between male and female; or rather, between man and girl. Steer, however, has reversed Degas's theme of the active, powerful, male gaze and the defenceless female body.[25] In Steer's painting, the whole scene is depicted as a mirror reflection, and thus we are invited to examine the relationship between artist and model. The setting is the artist's private studio, a space of artistic intimacy rather than domestic security. Rose is seated in the foreground, bent over as she removes her shoe, and in the background, Steer is seen holding his palette, his arm and gaze directed toward an off-stage easel. Steer, remarkably, has decapitated himself with the painting's frame as if symbolically castrating his own gaze.

While Harrison suggests that this was a way for Steer to express his guilt for his sexual attraction to Rose, one is also reminded of all those decapitated heads that rolled at the feet of numerous Salomes.[26] Steer has thematised the act of "looking" at

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[25] See, for example, Carol M. Armstrong's article, "Edgar Degas and the Representation of the Female Body," which provides a thorough and engaging analysis of the theme of the gaze in Degas's *The Interior*. Armstrong notes that in Degas's painting, the male figure "acts" upon the female figure by "viewing," and that the relationship between the two is "that of viewer to body, a subject acting upon an object through the gaze" (229).

[26] It was an artistic commonplace in the *fin de siècle* for poets and painters to imagine themselves as the beheaded Orpheus, Holofernes, or John the Baptist as a comment on the pernicious effects women had on the beleaguered artist. Woman was seen to hunger for money (like prostitutes) while absorbing man's "vital" fluid which, according to the learned sexologists and biologists, meant a drain of man's intelligence and power. Dijkstra summarises thus: "Symbolic castration, woman's lust for man's severed head, the seat of the brain, that 'great clot of seminal fluid' Ezra Pound would still be talking about in the 1920s, was obviously the supreme act of the male's physical submission to woman's predatory desire. Turn-of-the-century artists searched far and wide to come up with instructive examples of such emasculating feminine perfidy" (375).

Page 79 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:3, Philip Wilson Steer's painting, *Self-portrait with Model* (ca. 1894), The Earl of Drogheda; rpt. in Bruce Laughton, *Philip Wilson Steer: 1860-1942* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) Plate 100.

a young girl not as just a guilty pleasure, but as downright hazardous. As in Wilde's play, *Salomé*, it is too much "looking" that leads to symbolic castration.[27] Indeed, as Harrison suggests, Steer "has managed to exchange his role of observer/*voyeur* for that of protagonist/lover" (146). It is not his "guilt" that has "exacted its own stern price" (146), but rather, his enslavement to the spectacle of a young and knowing vixen. Steer was so proud of this vision of emasculating decapitation by a young seductress that he submitted it to the risqué journal, *The Yellow Book*, edited by the notorious artist Aubrey Beardsley, for publication in the July 1894 issue.

In Victorian England's emerging commodity culture, the body of a young girl like Rose Pettigrew was subject to a gaze not altogether free of desire or feelings of inadequacy. Though Steer is not one of the more lurid examples of those "Other" Victorians, his obsession with Rose Pettigrew participates in a trend that dominated turn-of-the-nineteenth-century culture, what Jon Stratton calls "active commodity fetishism" in which "the commodity appears to entice the consumer into buying it" (33). As we saw with the conflation of enticing seaside girls with advertising strategies or magazine sales, the young female body was configured in such a way as to add sexual desire to the process of commodification. Steer's high art aspirations reflected the popular commodity cultural fascination with pubescent female bodies by adding the elements of erotic enticement, voyeuristic pleasure and, finally, in this new desiring structure, the "male experience of inadequacy" which is "projected onto the female body [...]" (25). Dijkstra argues that when the image of adult woman tumbled from innocent grace, the search for innocence then focused on the young girl. In the visual arts, however, "the search for the lineaments of the mother's lost innocence in the features of the child could easily take the form of a rediscovery of the enticements of woman in the physical body of the creature whose mental equal she supposedly already was. As a result, the portrayal of the child [...] often came to echo the representations of women in art" (190). Steer's paintings of Rose Pettigrew, seen in this light, reveal their relationship not only with commodity culture, but with images of the erotic but dangerous *femme fatale*.

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[27] See Dijkstra for an analysis of the theme of sight in Wilde's *Salomé* (pp. 396-398).

IV. Die Brücke: Marcella, Fränzi and the Trauma of the Other

> **A little savagery or rather barbarity is not at all ill-suited to decadent periods. When the Roman Empire was dying of consumption, the northern barbarians often came to awaken if from lethargy. (Théophile Thoré, qtd. in Bade, "Art and Degeneration" 223)**

Humbert's ability to discern the demon nymphet from the throng of otherwise ordinary girl-children is that she is a desirable body marked by "otherness," just as the body of the *femme fatale* is markedly distinct from the body of an "ordinary" woman. The invocation of Lolita's, indeed every nymphet's, otherness—her departure from culturally constructed forms of childhood "normality"—is what makes her simultaneously a challenge to, and a critique of, the society that produced her. In *fin-de-siècle* Europe, an oft-repeated platitude was that the visual arts, as a reflection of culture itself, were decadent and in decline (Bade, "Art and Degeneration" 220-221). Toudouze's *Salome Triumphant* (fig. 3:2) would not only have been considered a "decadent" type of painting—a kind of laborious rococo—but because Salome's body is traversed by several forms of otherness, a simultaneous allegorical critique of the nineteenth century's own wealth, luxury and decadence is visually established and participated in.

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, post-Impressionist avant-garde movements, such as Expressionism, also invoked shocking otherness in order to express a deep-seated pessimism about modern industrial society and its social formations. Such is the case with the Dresden-based Die Brücke artists' group, founded in 1905 by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. What makes Die Brücke particularly relevant for this study is their focus on the image of the pubescent female as a way to express a profound distrust of Western culture. From 1909 through 1911, the image of the pubescent girl became the central theme for a series of paintings in which the body of the girl-child, once a figure of an optimistic and civilised future, such as Gotch's *The Child Enthroned* (fig. 3:1), was figured as a body traumatised by cultural uncertainty.

For the avant-garde Die Brücke, as I will argue, there is more at work than just a revolutionary stylistic transformation of Western painting. Two related ideas are at work in Die Brücke, one artistic and the other cultural. While Die Brücke artists favoured the flat, bold colours, and fluid two-dimensional stylisation of Fauvism (Janson 649-650), the painting strategies employed in depicting Marcella and Fränzi merge Fauvism with a primitive style inspired by sculptures from Cameroon, masks from the South Sea Islands and, especially, Palau house beam carvings. These items were artefacts from Germany's colonies and displayed in the

Dresden Ethnographic Museum (Gordon 373). Inspired as they were by these colonial artefacts, Die Brücke's use of primitive stylisation functioned as a radical transformation of (indeed, a complete break with) what they perceived to be stale and worn-out artistic forms. The rejection of conventional formal properties coincided with their belief that modern society, too, was stale and exhausted. Donald E. Gordon, in his essay, "German Expressionism," comments that primitivism was "aesthetically meaningful as well as culturally oriented" (369).

While being revolutionary in form, Die Brücke paintings of Marcella and Fränzi also transform the culturally symbolic meaning of the girl-child. Hilton Kramer suggests in his article, "The 'Primitivism' conundrum," that Die Brücke artists offered "an outright attack on the conventions and assumptions of Western cultural life as they had come to be seen in the established values of advanced industrial societies," as well as an attack on the values of bourgeois culture (6). Part of their avant-garde provocation was to violently undermine the image of girlhood. As we shall see, this transformation of the image of the girl-child involves a visual destabilisation of hierarchical social formations, and invokes the threat of the other on Western bourgeois ideas about morality, race and class.

Kramer rightly asserts that Die Brücke, and German Expressionism in general, "remained firmly attached to one of the most deeply entrenched traditions of Western thought—the romantic tradition that invoked the purity and vitality of nature as an alternative to the moribund forms of inherited culture" (3). As with Rousseau, who deployed the concepts of nature and childhood as an attack on Enlightenment values, nature and childhood are used by Die Brücke to attack modern industrial society.

Marcella and Fränzi were non-professional models, a choice that reflected Die Brücke artists' initial desire to paint nudes, unencumbered by artificial studio training, in "natural" settings. The artists spent summer lakeside idylls with their young models in Moritzburg, where the artists sketched the girls as they swam and played.[28] For Die Brücke artists, girl-children provided vicarious access to the supposed child-like simplicity, spontaneity and freedom of tribal cultures. Going "native," (370) as Gordon terms it, was seen as an ideological retreat from Germany's rapid industrialisation and depersonalised urban spaces, a way to romance the child-like "savage" while rejecting the civilised.

When it came time to put *die kleine Mädchen* on canvas, however, the consolation of non-threatening, spontaneous "naturalness" is conspicuously absent. Not only are the girls artificially posed, but are located in interior settings rather than in nature. Furthermore, in the paintings of Marcella and Fränzi, "instead of some loving and admiring vision of youth," as John Neubauer explains in his study, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence*, we find "a distanced and almost ruthless exposure of frailty, instability, and even ugliness" (101). These paintings are a marked departure from the sentimental images of ideal middle-class girls, either frolicking on the beach, or tranquilly enthroned as future nurturing matrons. Neither do we see a simple return to, or retreat into, the primitive as uncorrupted "nature," nor a simple invocation of childhood as "purity." Instead, the Rousseauesque notion of childhood is dramatically transformed to suit a new *fin-de-siècle* context, and reflect the discourses, especially those of race, class and female sexuality, that circulated at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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[28] The entire undertaking was not without a certain amount of community curiosity and suspicion. The mother of the girls nervously checked in on the situation every now and then, and once a local police officer, suspecting "immoral activities," seized one of Max Pechstein's paintings as evidence of said immorality, and which, three months later, a public prosecutor laughed out of court (Neubauer 98).

The fact that the image of the pubescent girl symbolically coincided with the avant-garde aims of Die Brücke artists is not surprising. "Die Brücke," in German, means literally "the bridge," which implies transitional states such as from one artistic style to another, one generation to another, or a state of cultural instability. Visual portrayals of an unstable transitory state—in this case, female pubescence—were thus, we may posit, a way for Die Brücke artists to explore the mood of cultural transition and crisis that marked the European *fin de siècle*. Die Brücke symbolically reworks the German tradition of sentimental iconography which, as art historian Robert Rosenblum explains in his study, *The Romantic Child From Runge to Sendak*, like the rest of continental Europe, England, and North America, entailed an "elevation of the child to Blake-like realms of heavenly, quasi-religious innocence, a creature as unpolluted as the ambient vision of nature" (20). In Die Brücke paintings, childhood is depicted as far from "heavenly" or "unpolluted." With the image of girlhood functioning as "a mirror" of the German *fin de siècle*'s "own uneasiness with its heritage, its crisis of identity [...]" (Neubauer 10), Die Brücke, Neubauer explains, revealed a sense of "fluid situations, unstable characters, and images of impermanence [...]" (97). Two paintings in particular, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Marcella* (1909-10) and Erich Heckel's *Girl (Fränzi) with Doll* (1910), are striking examples of how Die Brücke transformed Rousseau's childhood into a site of cultural trauma.

Kirchner's painting, titled *Marcella* (fig. 3:4), is a seated nude that employs a two-dimensional, colourful Fauvist style merged with the jutting, angular elements of Palau carving (Neubauer 99). The bold handling of the paint, the vibrant colours, and the abrupt angles seem to pack the figure with a sense of movement and energy. Such a visual strategy is uncommon in conventional paintings of serene, Romantic children where peach-and-cream colours and swirling circular compositions give a placid sense of soothing visual quietude (Higonnet 15). Marcella is poised and confident, looking candidly at the viewer, her arms insouciantly placed across her lap. The expressive prominence of her full, bright red lips and darkened, predatory eyes, give her a physical and sexual vitality typically found in paintings of *femmes fatales*, and which, a few years later, become the key visual codes of cinematic "vamps," such as Theda Bara. Coupled with her vitality is Marcella's frank gaze at the viewer that bespeaks not just a lack of girlish modesty, but a knowing adult sexuality. Her pose, her direct gaze, and her energy challenges images of benign, bourgeois little girls by embodying an active, almost predatory, female desire.

Pointon notes that "what makes paintings of young girls exciting and visually significant is the contrast between that presumed innocence and something that might generally be understood to endanger it" (181-182). This idea of imperilled innocence is notably thematised in Edvard Munch's 1895 painting titled *Puberty*. Unlike the poised and confident Marcella, Munch's painting depicts a stiffly seated nude girl who appears frightened and embarrassed, her tense arms covering her pubic area, apparently traumatised at the onset of puberty—indeed, traumatised by her own sexuality. In Munch's painting, the threat of female sexuality is presented as an

Page 87 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:4, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's painting, *Marcella* (1909-10), Moderna Museet, Stockholm; rpt. in John Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 100.

ominous shadow that lurks over the "innocent" girl's shoulder. If we again turn to Kirchner's *Marcella*, which was inspired by, and a marked departure from, Munch's work, the threat of active female sexuality is figured directly on the body of the girl rather than ominously lurking outside of it.

The projection of the primitive on the bodies of young girls was not without its ideological implications, notably the threat of multiple forms of "degeneration" that plagued *fin-de-siècle* thought. Gordon argues that Kirchner and Heckel "took extraordinary steps to *limit* the primitivizing implications" by giving their nudes the "attributes of civilization" (372). In the case of Kirchner's *Marcella*, the attribute of civilisation would be the bow in the girl's hair. Yet rather than "limiting" the semiotic implications of the primitive, such attributes of civilisation pull the figure into a nexus of anxieties about the potential degeneration of white European culture. As Nancy Stepan explains in her article, "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places," "The fear was growing that degeneration within civilized peoples threatened civilization itself" (112). Degeneration was believed to result from racial miscegenation, by the intermingling of classes, and was seen as an attribute of the criminal-type, such as the prostitute. It is perhaps more correct to say that Kirchner's young female figure has been given the "attributes" of the primitive as a form of commentary on Western culture's own lack of vitality and energy, while simultaneously invoking the threat of degeneration.

If we examine Heckel's *Girl (Fränzi) with Doll* (fig. 3:5), we see that similar strategies are employed in a more dramatic manner. Fränzi is posed as the conventional reclining Venus, the ultimate image of Western female sexuality. The

Page 89 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:5, Erich Heckel's painting, *Girl (Fränzi) with Doll* (1910), Private Collection; rpt. in John Neubauer, *The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 107.

near-abstract formal properties of the painting undermine the function of the traditional female nude in Western painting, in which smooth facture is an extension of the smooth and unhindered gaze at the woman's body (Armstrong 223). Like Kirchner's painting of Marcella, Fränzi's body is jutting, angular and androgynous, and her face bears a frank, but ambivalent, direct gaze at the viewer. In Heckel's painting, there is a simultaneous deconstruction of the figure of the nude and of the figure of the child. As with the traditional nude, Fränzi's large pouting lips and her propped up body are the visual codes of sexual awareness and availability. In a provocative visual manoeuvre, Heckel's little Venus holds a child's doll on her knee. The world of the erotically reclining nude and the world of the child are brought into an uneasy tension where the attributes of the "civilised"—the traditional nude and the toy—and the "primitive"—the sharp stylisation—meet at an ambiguous and fluid site, specifically, on the body of the pubescent girl-child. Heckel cleverly undermines the sterilised image of girlhood, symbolically reflected in her doll, which then appears as nothing more than an ironic prop.

This incongruous juxtaposing of the visual codes of active, vital female sexuality with the undeveloped body of a girl-child in both Kirchner's and Heckel's paintings overturns all the conventions for depicting Romantic childhood: the girls are neither aestheticised nor idealised; they are not passive, but active, both psychically and sexually. They are transgressive images in which there is a visual disruption of several hierarchical social divisions: the exotic primitive other is reflected in the figure of the European female; the erotic visual codes energise what is presumed to be sexually innocent; indeed, the attributes of the *femme fatale* overlap with the female child in a fluid and unstable relationship. The multiple visual transgressions at work in both paintings call to mind the use of primitive stylisation in Pablo Picasso's famous painting of prostitutes, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1906-07). In *Demoiselles*, the female figures have faces and bodies stylised after African statues and, more importantly, Mbuya sickness masks. Deviant female sexuality (prostitution) is visually associated with disease and primitive cultures. Hal Foster explains in his essay, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," that Picasso's female figures convey the "shock of this encounter" between the West and tribal cultures, as well as "the fact that the West—its patriarchal subjectivity and socius—is threatened by loss, by lack, by others" (46). Die Brücke's young female figures similarly convey this sense of shock and threat: just as it is significant that Picasso projected the primitive onto the body of woman, so it is significant that Die Brücke projected the primitive onto the body of the young girl.[29]

Kirchner's and Heckel's paintings of Marcella and Fränzi situate the young girls' bodies at a volatile borderline between civilised and savage, non-threatening girlhood innocence and the threatening, exotic *femme fatale*. Rather than reinforcing an "imaginary set of oppositions (light/dark, rational/irrational, civilised/savage)" (Foster 58), Marcella and Fränzi appear to be hybrid bodies that conflate, and collapse, Western binary oppositions. Indeed, Die Brücke paintings of Marcella and Fränzi embody the crisis of the "bridge." As art critic Lynda Nead explains in *The*

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[29] Hilton Kramer rejects the idea that "primitivism" was in part inspired by a fear of woman, yet fear of woman was ideologically related to the fear of tribal cultures as both the woman and the "primitive" were seen as forming an evolutionary continuity. Picasso himself said of *Demoiselles* that in it he exorcised his fear of "unknown threatening spirits;" that "everything is an enemy!...women, children...the whole of it!" (qtd. in Foster 45).

Female Nude, "All transitional states [...] pose a threat; anything that resists classification or refuses to belong to one category or another emanates danger" (6). Marcella and Fränzi refuse classification by existing at the margin; that is, they are little girls who wear bows in their hair and hold dolls, but they are posed like odalisques and harlots. They are at once middle-class white European, and racially other. Such a confusion of visual terms reflects the confusion that marked the *fin de siècle*. Die Brücke artists, such as Kirchner and Heckel, were depicting in the formal properties, and in the figure of the girl-child, what the sociologist Georg Simmel, a contemporary of Die Brücke, had to say about European culture in general: "[Today] the bridge between the past and the future of cultural forms seems to be demolished, we gaze into an abyss of unformed life beneath our feet. But perhaps this formlessness is itself the appropriate form for contemporary life" (qtd. in Gordon 371).

V. Balthus: Sugar and Vice[30]

> **Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. [...] All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the Middle Age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. (Walter Pater, qtd. in Praz 253)**

If Die Brücke's figures of transitional chaos resist simple classification, the same can be said of Balthus's highly mannered paintings of young girls. Of all visual artists who paint lovely Lolitas, Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, 1908-2000) has become the most notorious painter for late-twentieth-century visual culture. The figure of the "Balthus girl," as Sabine Rewald points out in her article, "Balthus's Thérèses," has become a "trademark" image in "advertising, film, and fashion" (312), and, much like the moniker "Lolita," has come to signify a certain kind of sexually attractive young girl. Balthus's dreamy nymphets are often compared with Nabokov's Lolita, and that Balthus has been dubbed a painter of "Lolitas" is not surprising. Though writer and critic Claude Roy, in his book, *Balthus*, loathes the "vulgarity" of the association, and claims that "Balthus's world is poles apart from that of Humbert Humbert" (145), it must be admitted that the Balthus girl's immodest poses and precocious thighs would send Humbert Humbert into paroxysms of delight.

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[30] This subtitle is gleaned from the title of Richard Flood's review of the Balthus retrospective at the Met in 1984. His title is a play on the child's rhyme that claims that little girls are made of "sugar and spice and everything nice."

Nabokov himself, in an interview with Alfred Appel in 1970, noted and admired the "Lolita-like creatures" in Balthus's *oeuvre* (*Strong Opinions* 167).

For my purposes, Balthus's *chef d'oeuvre*, the seductive pubescent girl, is to be placed within a discussion of, and in the context of, the twentieth century's sense of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety. Though Balthus painted many of his eerily erotic girls from the 1930s onward, Balthus has become something of an *enfant terrible* in contemporary visual culture for his "Lolita-like creatures," especially since his wildly successful 1984 retrospective exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. To be sure, Balthus has always appealed to an elite group of collectors but, as Rewald notes, Balthus's images of erotic girlhood have had a profound impact on turn-of-the-twentieth-century popular culture. Mahonri Sharp Young, commenting on the recent "Balthus Phenomenon" in a review for *Apollo*, says, "Nothing of this kind has made such a hit since Nabokov's *Lolita*" (445).

Art critic Lance Esplund, in his article, "Enter Balthus," points out that what has preoccupied Balthus is the "realm of the between or the unknown," a sense of being "suspended between worlds" (47). In this respect, the typical "Balthus girl" shares much with Die Brücke paintings of Marcella and Fränzi. The pubescent girl reflected the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* sense of transition and uncertainty, a "realm of the between," or as Simmel called it, a feeling of "formlessness." Similarly, the figure of the girl in a Balthus painting appeals to contemporary culture's sense of dread provoked by "the unknown" at the turn of the twentieth century.

Where Balthus's fetching young creatures part ways with Die Brücke's poised little primitives is in representational strategies; Balthus, more than any other twentieth-century painter, makes direct references to images of the *fin-de-siècle femme fatale* and all her forbidden eroticism. As we shall see in the chapter devoted to film, director Stanley Kubrick employs a similar strategy in constructing his 1962 cinematic version of Lolita. Just as Walter Pater's lavish description of Da Vinci's *Gioconda*, quoted at the beginning of this section, defined the image of the *femme fatale* for the nineteenth century, Balthus has visually defined the child (femme) fatale for contemporary culture. Balthus's girls, like any number of images of *fin-de-siècle femmes fatales*, stretch out on sofas, gaze into mirrors, languish in dream-like states with distinct, self-satisfied expressions, and are almost always accompanied by a large, arrogant cat. The family resemblance between Pater's version of the *Gioconda* and the Balthus girl is striking. Balthus's girls are figured as archetypal *femmes fatales*: they are haughty but bored, with "eyelids" that "are a little weary"; they have a feline "animalism"; in their serene settings and claustrophobic rooms, they seem to ponder "strange thoughts and fantastic reveries"; and, like the sinful Lucretia Borogia, are poisonously seductive.

Between 1936 and 1939, the young Thérèse Blanchard posed as a model for Balthus when she was between the ages of eleven and fourteen years. Of Balthus's series of paintings of her, one in particular has served popular culture well: *Jeune fille au chat*, or *Girl with a Cat* (1937). The girl's provocative pose is a formula Balthus has repeated numerous times in over fifty years of his painting career,[31] and a formula readily picked up by popular culture in the late twentieth century. A close scrutiny of this particular painting reveals several elements that are especially perturbing for viewers, and those elements that, paradoxically, are most useful for popular culture's figuration of the disruptive Lolita-type.

If we turn our attention to *Jeune fille au chat* (fig. 3:6), the first striking feature is the girl's suggestive pose, one which Calvin Klein's models will later mimic in the scandalous 1995 advertising campaign. Thérèse, with her hands behind her head, "one knee up" under her "skirt" (*Lolita* 44), and her kneesock falling down, is posed in the classic "cheesecake" manner, the staple of nineteenth-century advertising, pornography and, more recently, *Playboy* centrefolds.[32] Thérèse's pose simultaneously participates in both the licit, but erotic, public practices of advertising, as well as the illicit, but private, erotics of smut. To reinforce this ambiguous voyeuristic pleasure, something of a striptease has occurred: her skirt has slid forward to expose her thighs, thus permitting a peek at her undergarments. Thérèse's pose is far more suggestive than any *Playboy* centrefold, for Barthes, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, maintains that "the most erotic portion of a body" is "*where the garment gapes*" (9), thus allowing for the seductive flash of skin. The "flash itself [...] seduces" for,

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[31] See for example *Therese rêvant* (1938), *Les beaux jours* (1944-45), *Nu au chat* (1949), *La chambre* (1952-54), and *Katia lisant* (1968-76), all of which have been reproduced in Rewald's *Balthus*.

[32] Curiously, Balthus gleaned this pose from Man Ray's 1935 *Photocollage* which was based on a 1901 Pears Soap advertisement. In the advertisement, a little girl, with one knee up, strikes the familiar cheesecake pose. This advertisement was, in turn, based on the 1886 painting *After Dinner* by the Victorian painter Émile Munier (Rewald, "Balthus's Thereses" 313; Rewald, *Balthus* 41-42).

Page 97 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:6, Balthus's painting, *Jeune fille au chat* (1937), Private Collection; rpt. in Jean Leymarie, *Balthus* (London: MacMillon London Ltd., 1982) 132.

like a "schoolboy's dream," the flash provokes "the *hope* of seeing" so much more (10).

Though Thérèse is not a nude, she shares much with Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) (fig. 3:7). Charles Bernheimer, in his notable article, "Manet's *Olympia*: The Figuration of Scandal," concludes that Olympia's scandal rested on her "strong signs of desiring subjectivity" (258), which, unlike the conventional nude, creates "a disobedient, morbid, inhuman body that offers no flattering consolation in fantasy" (263). Thérèse's monumental stature gives her an air of imposing hautiness worthy of any *grande cocotte*. Like Olympia, she seems to "invite objectification," but at the same time "appears to defy appropriation" (266). Whereas conventional images of serene Romantic children invite nothing but objectification and a soothing fantasy of purity and innocence, Thérèse's taut body defies the codes of ideal domestication. Because Thérèse is so young, her "pose and expression prophetically" hints "at her future situation" (Wind, qtd. in Pointon 181). Her future situation is obviously not that of a domesticated, nurturing household Madonna but rather that of a contemporary Olympia.

The various items that surround her, the symbolic accoutrements of her feminine nature, are derived from classic *fin-de-siècle* images of the *femme fatale*. Notably absent are those reassuring gender-based childhood toys, specifically, in this case, dolls. Balthus's solitary girls do not pose with any childhood bric-a-brac to imply that they have ever played, or will play, or even want to play, in the conventional sense of the term. The idea of girls engaged in a socially acceptable form of play is how the world of the innocent child is defined; that is, "to keep

Page 99 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 3:7, Édouard Manet's painting, *Olympia* (1863), Gallerie du Jeu de Paume, Musée du Louvre, Paris; rpt. in Georges Bataille, *Manet* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1983) 103.

children rollicking around in a state of freedom" (79), as Kincaid points out in his book, *Child-Loving*: "Playing children are free, we believe, without a hint of the many cares that will come. They are blissfully happy" (80). Instead, Thérèse appears to be suffering from an overwhelming *ennui*. Richard Flood, as if noting this lack of blissful "childhood happiness" in his review of the Met's retrospective, compares Balthus's girls to Zola's "marvellous whore, Nana. Habitual sensualists, these children are bored with self-discovery. [...] Balthus drains these children of innocence and replaces it with something dark and cunning" (85).

Rather than childhood toys, we observe "dark and cunning" boudoir props. Next to Thérèse, luxuriously draped material echoes the contour of her flexed knee. The material not only draws further attention to her provocative pose, but invokes a sense of the sumptuous. A full-length mirror, to the left, adds the suggestion of auto-erotic narcissism. Gary Indiana, in his article, "Balthus in Wonderland," notes Balthus's particular talent for depicting "adolescent figures of haughty feline seduction" (186), and this is no doubt due to the presence of cats. At Thérèse's feet sits a very large tabby cat, with a face that resembles her own, and which bears a similar air of blasé arrogance. The cat is an important element of the *mise en scène*, adding both a compositional anchor and, as in *Olympia*, functioning as a symbol of her immoral, feline nature. Paglia, in *Sexual Personae*, gives a remarkable analysis of the "persona" of the cat in visual culture, and her analysis beautifully articulates the reason why cats dominate in paintings of *femmes fatales*. Her analysis also helps to explain how the large tabby cat functions in *Jeune fille au chat* in particular. Paglia notes that "cats are autocrats of naked self-interest. They are both amoral and immoral, consciously breaking rules." The cat, she goes on to say, "may be the only animal who savors the perverse or reflects upon it." It is an animal that "is narcissistic, always adjusting its appearance." Symbolically, the cat "has never lost its despotic air of Oriental luxury and indolence." Finally, cats have "secret thoughts" (64-66).

The despotic air, the secrecy and the mystery that surround Thérèse are compositionally achieved via a claustrophobically rendered interior, which suggests that the interior world of the child is full of dark, sombre thoughts unavailable for adult scrutiny. Rewald notes that the "subdued and somber hues of his palette reinforce the remoteness of his figures. But within these austere and hushed interiors often lurks something foreboding and disorienting" (*Balthus* 37). The sombre pallet and the frozen stillness of the figure are indebted to Balthus's idolatry of Piero della Francesca's fifteenth-century classicism,[33] which accounts for his "strict discipline of the composition" ("Balthus's Thérèses" 305). Thérèse, like Piero's religious figures, seem eternal and frozen in time. In her pose of "frozen formality" (Indiana 185), the Balthus girl seems to exist on Humbert Humbert's "enchanted island" of time (*Lolita* 16). In this sense of frozen formality and eternity, the Balthus girl comes closest to the image of the eternal, permanently corrupted *femme fatale*.

As with Nabokov's novel, Balthus's pictorial representations of young girls have provoked responses that swing from disgust to mystification. Flood, for example, comments that Balthus's work is "heroicized bourgeois naughtiness being saluted for being the right kind of pornography" (84). Flood is suggesting that

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[33] For the numerous artistic styles and influences in Balthus's work, see Rewald's *Balthus* (pp. 16-23).

Balthus's paintings are simply prurient titillation. Similarly, feminist art critic Linda Nochlin, when referring to *Jeune fille au chat* in her book, *Women, Art, and Power*, notes the "perversity of the subject matter" (31). If Nochlin means the salacious or smutty elements, what April Kingsley, in her article, "The sacred and erotic vision of Balthus," calls "an immediately obsessive sexual content" (30), then the painting is certainly perverse. Perversity, however, as V. Harger-Grinling and A. Thoms note in their article, "Robbe Grillet and Balthus: Art and the Adolescent," can also be defined as "the act of contradicting established rules, rebelling against accepted standards of 'right and good' and negating what is traditional" (150). It can be argued that this, too, is the definition of "transgression." Nochlin, however, argues against the notion that Balthus is a transgressive painter. Rather, she finds his paintings to be "extremely conservative, in fact, in the way they cling to an out-moded but modish language of visual repleteness, refusing to question the means of art except as the occasion of an added *frisson*" (32). While we can agree with Nochlin's assessment, we must also consider that "visual repleteness," or an abundance of codes, is similarly evident in sentimental paintings of innocent girl-children such as Gotch's excessive display, *The Child Enthroned* (fig. 3:1). Balthus subverts the repleteness of the iconography of purity and replaces it with the kind of excessive repleteness found in Toudouze's *Salome Triumphant* (fig. 3:2). Instead of figuring girlhood as a stern upright paragon of virtue, Balthus provides a sprawling body of confident pleasure.

For critics who wish to avoid a direct confrontation with the girl's pleasurable body, they can subject Balthus's painting to a process of mystification, and find solace in, for example, canonical literature. Rewald, who was responsible for writing the exhibition catalogue for Met-goers, directs viewers to observe that "Balthus's depictions of children are indeed based on earlier prototypes—not, however, the timeless heavenly ones [...], but willful nineteenth-century literary ones" ("Balthus's Thérèses" 307). Certainly, as Rewald proposes, there is a sense of the dark and destructive passions that bind Heathcliff and Cathy in Emily Brönte's *Wuthering Heights* (1848), or Paul and Élisabeth's neurotic, claustrophobic play-time in Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles* (1929). We can even add the hauntingly beautiful, but demonically haunted, Miles and Flora in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). But in Balthus's world, Cathy, Élisabeth, and Flora often appear without their male counterparts. They are solitary figures who, like Colette's "Innocent Libertine," linger in their own precocious fantasies.

Recourse to literary prototypes does not solve the enigma of the "Balthus girl" nor account for the "subtle and elusive unease" and "perverse bewilderment" (Roy 262). In 1934, critic Gaston Poulain referred to Balthus as "the Freud of painting" (qtd. in Rewald, "Balthus Lessons" 90), for Balthus's sensual nymphets are certainly indebted to Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).[34] *Jeune fille au chat* seems to be a deadpan illustration from *Three Essays*, especially when Freud describes polymorphously perverse children as "essentially without shame" and who "show an unmistakable satisfaction in exposing their bodies [...]" (110). Without the "mental dams against sexual excess—shame, disgust and morality," Freud claims, a child can resemble the prostitute, that "average uncultivated woman in whom the same polymorphously perverse disposition persists" (109). Like Freud, Balthus presents an image of childhood that is complex, libidinal, and humorous. However, with so much invested in the image of sexually innocent girl, contemporary culture appears unwilling to accept Freud's claim that the "disposition to perversion of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic" (109), even in childhood.

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[34] Balthus was closely associated with writer Pierre Jean Jouve and his wife, Dr. Blanche Reverchon-Jouve, a psychoanalyst, who translated Freud's *Three Essays* into French in 1924. Balthus had more than ample opportunity to become familiar with Freud's theories of childhood sexuality (Rewald, *Balthus* 32).

Balthus's serene idols of perversity provide absolutely no visual display of Romantic innocence, except that which critics struggle to project onto their resistant bodies. For the twentieth century's *fin de siècle*, this lack of idealising structure, and the total corruption of the image of innocent girlhood, simultaneously intrigues, titillates and provokes cautionary tales about the perversity of culture itself. Balthus's own comments about his paintings of Lolita-like creatures explains why the image of female adolescence is so effective for expressions of twentieth-century anxiety: "I use teenage girls as a symbol. I could never paint a woman. Adolescent beauty is more interesting. Adolescence represents the future [...]. The body of a woman is already defined. The mystery has vanished" (qtd. in Esplund 47). The adolescent girl, as with the *femme fatale*, is a mysterious figure, a symbol, and a prophecy about the unfolding future. The figure of the Balthus girl, as Pater once said of the *Gioconda*, stands "as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea" (qtd. in Praz 254).

Balthus's "symbols," as reflections of modern ideas, so completely dismantle the Romantic visual rhetoric of heavenly childhood that the ideal seems utterly lost. When a cherished cultural value appears threatened, a sense of nostalgia replaces assuredness, and optimism is replaced by pessimism. In the next chapter, I examine the role photography has played in the continuation of the child (femme) fatale's disruptive visual tradition. Since paintings of girls no longer function as the primary visual evidence for childhood purity, society now searches for evidence of innocence in "real" images of children. Photography, with its strong nostalgic undercurrents, and apparent connectedness to "reality," seems to be the key apparatus for providing the necessary solace about childhood, and cultural, innocence. It is for this reason, however, that photographic practices are subject to strict surveillance and policing. As we shall see, however, what has occurred in paintings of young girls is now occurring in photography, especially in fashion photography and advertising, and despite the policing. The Lolita Phenomenon in photography combines the voyeurism of Steer's paintings, Die Brücke themes of cultural uncertainty, and Balthus's appropriation of *femme fatale* iconography. In a society that has ideologically invested so much of its own sense of security in the image of innocent, placid girlhood, provocative photographs of young girls strike a far more fearful chord.

Chapter Four: Photographing the *Fruit vert*

> **Society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 117)**
>
> **[T]he archetypes of the nineteenth century are alive and well. (Higonnet 76)**

I.

"La petite coquette runway baby Devon Aoki plays the ultimate dress-up in spring's haute couture" (167), reads the prefacing copy to an extremely beautiful and provocative fashion spread in the April, 1999, *Harper's Bazaar*. What makes this particular display of *haute couture* in a popular magazine fascinating is that not only do the glamourous fashions echo turn-of-the-nineteenth-century decadent style, but that the model, Devon Aoki (one of the late twentieth century's hot little supermodels) is such a precocious "petite coquette." The Lolita Phenomenon in fashion photography reached its apogee in the mid-to-late 1990s when waifish, or very young, models paraded down catwalks, across the pages of glossy magazines, or were monumentally posed on billboards. All were dressed, or semiotically draped, in the highly eroticised and dread-inspiring wardrobe of the *femme fatale*. Devon Aoki, for example, with her air of oriental exoticism, posed for this shoot as a "Parisian Princess," a "Modern Angel," a "Dashing Mermaid," a "Hollywood Goddess," and donned "Stingray" hardware and feathers.

This remarkable fashion spread directly participates in the history of nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* art, evoking and reviving both its context, and its fear of the castrating woman. Take, for example, our "runway baby" posing as "Christian

Dior's Parisian Princess," and wearing "a sexy linen tea dress" with an "asymmetrical knotted 'loop of love' collar" (168) (fig. 4:1). Her seductive posture, as she languidly leans against a wall, immediately calls to mind the prostitute; specifically, in this case, a well-dressed Parisian café whore at the turn of the nineteenth century. Humbert Humbert would have likened her to his favourite *petite* prostitute, Monique, whom he describes as "a delinquent nymphet shining through the matter-of-fact young whore" (*Lolita* 23). Devon's pose, and the implied milieu, references Félecine-Joseph-Victor Rops's (1833-98) turn-of-the-nineteenth-century *femmes fatales* of the Parisian streets, who prostitute themselves for a much needed drink, such as in his etching, "Absinthe Drinker" (c 1890) (fig. 4:2). Rops, as Jennifer Birkett explains in her article, "*Fin-de-siècle* Painting," was particularly adept at detailing decadent Paris as a city of "seduction, perversion, hypocrisy, masking and greed" (159). As in Rops's etching, Devon Aoki, parading in fetishised clothing, is situated in a world "founded on brutal pleasures, paid for with cash" (159). She poses as the girl "irremediably corrupted by civilisation" (159).

It is almost too appropriate that these images appeared in 1999, the year of society's great millennial anxiety and sense of social dread. Worries about cultural decadence, urban decay, disease, and the looming possibility of technological failure had reached a heightened urgency. The figure to embody all these fears is, of course, the *femme fatale*, yet there is a peculiar modification of the *femme fatale* image for the late twentieth century; that is, the image of the girl-child gets to play the "ultimate dress-up" where the clothes and the stylistic conventions associated with the *femme*

Page 108 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:1, Patrick Demarchelier's photograph of Devon Aoki for Christian Dior. Fashion Feature: "Haute Couture," *Harper's Bazaar* (April, 1999) 168.

Page 109 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:2, Félicien-Joseph-Victor Rops's etching, *The Absinthe Drinker* (ca. 1897); rpt. in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 350.

fatale seem to fit her perfectly. What is most provocative in this image is the model's complete lack of expression, her numb casualness and indifference. This is as disquieting as any painting by Balthus precisely because we expect to see idealised images of "happy childhood," where girls enjoy playing "dress-up" or applying mother's lipstick. Instead, Devon Aoki, parading as a child (femme) fatale, is an image of perversity, at once beautiful, seductive, and who displays the *femme fatale*'s "indifferent and chilling remoteness from human feeling" (Allen 4). Her visage reverses and violates the image of Romantic girlhood as sentimental emblem for an optimistic future.

There are, in fact, two violations at work in this image of Devon Aoki in her sexy linen tea dress. "Photogenic beauty," sociologist Stuart Ewen tells us in his book, *All Consuming Images*, "rests its definition of perfection on a smooth standardized, and lifeless modernism, a machine aesthetic in the guise of a human" (89). This "machine aesthetic" is completely contrary to our ideas about the "naturalness" of young girls. The scandal of the Lolita figure in advertising would seem to be her unnaturalness or artificiality, the girl who becomes an adorned, mechanically reproduced child-whore. Devon is simultaneously a real girl, but one whose body is lifeless in its perfection like a breathing but barren mannequin. Secondly, there is the implied violation of sexual innocence—specifically, in this case, child prostitution—that is the *sine qua non* of ideal girlhood. Walkerdine, in her book, *Daddy's Girl*, says that there is a notable sense of threat in "the eroticized child, the little Lolita, the girl who presents as a little woman—not of the nurturant kind, but the seductress, the unsanitized whore to the good girl's virgin" (169). As we saw in the preceding chapter, the image of the child (femme) fatale challenges the image of the upright good girl and, like Toudouze's *Salome Triumphant* (fig. 3:2) embodies the threat of the rebellious, the morbidly diseased, and the degenerate, who threaten to topple civilised society from within.

In the following chapter, I examine the presence of what Nabokov called "Lolita-like creatures" (*Strong Opinions* 167) in photography. I begin by first discussing the notion of the photograph, its place within culture, and its various modes of representation. Christian Metz's definition of the photograph as a "fetish," and Barthes's musings on the photograph itself, provide the basis for analysing the numerous disquieting elements found in photographs of young girls. I then explore the nineteenth century, with the invention of photography, and pay particular attention to the amateur photographer Lewis Carroll. Carroll's posed studio portraits of his "little girl friends" often employ the visual codes appropriated from painting, and especially the codes of adult female sexuality. Carroll's photographs, more so than those of his contemporaries, operated as fetishes in the Freudian sense of the term. I then turn to twentieth century professional photographers David Hamilton and Sally Mann. Hamilton, who has on various occasions been called a pornographer, works within the idealising and the eroticising traditions of nineteenth-century visual culture simultaneously. Specifically, his ambiguously "idealised" depictions of adolescent girls often employ both the visual codes of dangerous female sexuality, and the visual rhetoric of pornography. Mann, on the other hand, in her photographs of twelve-year-old girls, uses the conventions of the documentary "snapshot" to subtly undermine the concept of the portrait, as well as the visual tradition of idealised, domestic, femininity.

With these traditions and practices in mind, I return to the Lolita Phenomenon in fashion photography where numerous nineteenth-century visual traditions often overlap with both Hamilton's overt eroticism, and Mann's strategies for depicting an intimate, but awkward, ambiguous female sexuality. I argue that these Lolita-like figures, especially those used in fashion photography, are like Bakhtin's grotesque or carnivalesque bodies that are glutted with cultural excess. Like the *femme fatale* of the nineteenth century, they function as powerful metaphors for the twentieth century's *fin-de-siècle* worry about the potentially chaotic future.

II. Little Girls and The Modern Fetish

> **Both the photograph and childhood accept their shape and their poignancy from death. If there were no death, why would childhood hold its appeal? If there were no death, why would our desire to photograph and to preserve lost moments be so urgent? (Mavor 5-6)**

Since photography's invention in the mid-nineteenth century, children have been one of its most popular subjects. Carol Mavor, in her study of Victorian photography, *Pleasures Taken*, notes that "photography was invented hand-in-hand with our modern conception of childhood. The child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other: they were laminated and framed as one" (3). Christian Metz, in his article, "Photography and Fetish," argues that the photograph—a small, "silent rectangle of paper"—combined with its possibility of "a lingering look," is "more likely to work as a fetish [...]" (81). The photograph is both a miniature memento of "loss," and, paradoxically, functions as a "protection against loss" (84). As with the modern notion of childhood innocence, "manufactured by Rousseau, with refinements by Wordsworth and a thousand lesser writers, interior decorators, and producers of greeting cards" (Kincaid, *Child-Loving* 72), the photograph seems to realistically preserve a moment in time, or a beloved person. Young girls, when photographed in an idealised manner, disavow or ward off threats to that ideal. When these ideal photographic images circulate within culture, they symbolically ward off the threat to society's own sense of "innocence."

As I mentioned at the end of the last chapter, photographic images now provide a more immediate contemporary mode of surveillance of childhood, and are, at the same time, strictly policed.[35] As we saw with paintings, images of "innocent" girls offer a visual assurance that ideologies and social structures are intact. Photographs, with their indexical nature, seem to adhere to the real, yet, as with paintings of girls, they symbolically point to cultural values. That is to say, the same "allegorizing structures" (Pointon 184) at work in a painting are also operative in a photograph. But photography as a social and cultural practice has a dualistic, even contradictory, value. Pierre Bourdieu, in his sociological study, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, notes that photographic practices are governed by two different social perceptions. On the one hand, photography is a popular apparatus, an amateur "low-brow" past-time, which serves to capture family life and formal events, "that of the presumed real, of life, mostly private and family life, birthplace of the Freudian fetish" (Metz 82). Photographer Sally Mann, for example, operates within this paradigm of domestic intimacy by employing the notion of snapshots of family life and formal events.

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[35] Here I am thinking of three specific cases where photographs of children resulted in public outrage and investigations, as well as arrests, in America: the charges of child-pornography laid against Jock Sturges, a well-known photographer of nudes, in 1990; two counts of child-pornography laid against the director of the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center in 1990 for two of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of children; and the 1995 Calvin Klein *Kids*-inspired fashion advertising campaign.

On the other hand, photography can function as "high-brow" art, "accompanied by learned commentary" (Metz 82), and exist in a field traditionally occupied by painting, and in which ideas and modes of representation are not wholly limited by social conventions and practices. Hamilton, for example, operates within this high-brow visual tradition, including the "commentary," yet his photographs are informed by the less-than-respectable elements of erotica. The use of photography in advertising has this entire range of conventions from which to draw: from high-brow stylisation gleaned from paintings, to the caught moment of the family snapshot, to the codes of erotica and pornography. Photography in contemporary culture is thus a conflicted art form—at once perceived to be a documentation of reality, as a site for artistic expression, and finally, as part of the process of active commodity fetishism.

Whether a photograph is seen as private or public, a documentary form or a visual art, such classifications do not go far enough to explain why some photographs of young girls provoke outrage, while others glide by in the daily maelstrom of visual images. Barthes, in his personal examination of photography, *Camera Lucida*, has found that discussions that focus on the technical art of composition and a photograph's formal properties, and those studies that examine the total phenomenon of photography from an historical or sociological perspective (as with Bourdieu) are far from satisfactory. Barthes goes on to provide two indispensable terms for the analysis of photography: the "studium" and the "punctum." The studium is the photographer's and the viewer's cultural understandings of the photograph. The photograph's studium (accepted cultural codes or ideologies) aims to reconcile the photograph with society by endowing it with "functions" or "alibis" (28). For example, the photograph of our runway baby coquette, Devon Aoki, functions as an *haute couture* image meant to display the latest fashion or style. The punctum, on the other hand, is a stray element that disturbs the studium and pricks or wounds the viewer (26). In other words, the punctum, existing as an off-frame emotion, can thwart a viewer's conventional visual habits and expectations.

Metz explains that the punctum "depends more on the reader than the photograph itself, and the corresponding off-frame it calls up is also generally subjective [...]" (87). I believe, however, that Barthes's notion of the punctum can be expanded to include collective off-frame social anxieties and emotions that circulate around the figure of the girl. The emotional response to Lolita-like creatures in photography can be, and indeed often is, a collective response and typically one of outrage. In the case of Devon Aoki, for example, the punctum may exist in the two violations that I mentioned—the sense that her "natural" childhood has been violated by unnaturalness, and of course the *frisson* generated by any image of a prostitute. In the photographs that I examine, their provocative nature, what Barthes terms an "*advenience*" or an "adventure" (19), is derived not only from the studium and its formal properties, but from a punctum that works on the level of manipulating or shocking off-frame social sensibilities. The punctum may involve references to *femme fatale* iconography, as we saw with Devon Aoki, in which the dread and fear of the corrupt woman are provoked. They may employ blatantly erotic elements, such as those used by David Hamilton, and thus provoke social anxieties associated with the pornographic. They may, as well, tap into larger, emotionally charged, cultural narratives about the sexuality of young girls, an effect achieved by Sally Mann. The scandal and the blasphemy of the Lolita-figure in photography is that her visage refuses to grant a soothing, collective fantasy about young female passivity and asexual innocence.

III. "Umber and Black Humberland": Nineteenth-century Photography

> **There are three essential things to note about this innocent child: first, it was concocted and not discovered; second, the quality of innocence was not only 'protected' but inculcated; third, we vastly overstate the dominance of this view in the Victorian period, expressing and exposing a need of our own. (Kincaid, *Child-Loving* 72)**

There is always some feeling of "shock" whenever another one of those "Other Victorians" is (re)discovered.[36] The Victorians, after all, had such monolithic ideas about the purity of childhood, or so it is believed. Perhaps this shock occurs because the present-day notion of childhood innocence is far less complex than anything the Victorians ever constructed, as Kincaid suggests in his book *Child-Loving*. For example, Higonnet, in her book, *Pictures of Innocence*, assumes much about the Victorians. Her hypothesis, that ideal childhood is in "crisis," rests on the assumption that contemporary images of what she calls "Knowing children" are a late-twentieth-century phenomenon and are a marked departure from the nineteenth-century sentimental Romantic child. Images of "Knowing children" that we see around us today, however, are older than Higonnet proposes. Images of "knowing" girls existed and circulated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Victorian photographers, in particular, had at their disposal many different means for expressing the concept of "knowing" or worldly girl-children. They often played out their photographic fantasies using metaphors and symbols gleaned from paintings of *femmes fatales*, for example.

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[36] Steven Marcus, in his book, *The Other Victorians*, comments that contemporary "shock" and wonder at the Victorians is due to the fact that Victorian culture "remains of interest to us as we try to understand the past and ourselves in relation to the past. Their otherness connects them to us, but so does the fact that they were Victorians connect them to us as well" (xiii).

While it is true that many photographs of young girls during the nineteenth century provided lovely visions of charming, middle-class childhood innocence and perfect purity, there existed other photographs that disrupted these visual dreams of innocence. As the American social protest photographer, Dorthea Lange, would do during the Depression, earlier photographers such as John Allison Spence documented the plight of the poor and the dispossessed, with girls providing a marvellous well-spring of middle-class tears, as well as confirming middle-class notions about the lack of sexual propriety in the working class or poor. Spence's calotype, "Street Child" (1851) (fig. 4:3), is simultaneously informed by a charity-inducing sentimentalism worthy of Charles Dickens, and an erotic component drawn from London's seedy street life. The girl's figure seems to emerge from the dark background, as if from the murk of the impoverished working class, and her head is tilted backward as if in a resigned sexual come-on.

Page 118 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:3, John Allison Spence's calotype, "Street Child" (1851); rpt. in Graham Ovenden and Robert Melville, *Victorian Children* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972) 6.

As with the earliest films, the erotic and pornographic potential of photography was happily exploited. Artist Graham Ovenden and critic Robert Melville, in their book, *Victorian Children*, note that only eight years after photography's invention in 1839, J. T. Withe assembled an album of explicitly erotic and pornographic photographs of young girls and child prostitutes, no doubt resembling the "collection of rather formal photographs in a rather soiled album" (*Lolita* 23) proffered to Humbert after he responded to an advertisement in a lewd magazine. Ovenden also points out in his book, *Victorian Erotic Photography*, that erotic postcards circulated as a "much-used vehicle for the nubile image, with the girl child out-numbering the adult pin-up nearly five to one" (72). Art reviewer Robin Muir, in his perusal of the exhibition, "Public Artist, Private Passions," finds "one of those Secret Victorians now so in vogue" (143) in Edward Linley Sambourne, who worked as an illustrator for *Punch* magazine. Sambourne was a secret photographer, "a voyeur and a devotee of pornography in the 'Parisian' style (stockings, masks, high heels)" (143). He also developed "a camera that pointed a false lens one way only to take a picture at another, allowing the viewer to remain unobserved and his subject unawares" (143). His favourite subjects for his trick camera were, not surprisingly, sailor-girl-suited Kensington schoolgirls on their way home.

As we saw with the painter Philip Wilson Steer, the obsession with the prepubescent or pubescent girl played a significant role in the libidinal economy of Victorian culture: in the "high-brow" world of painting, in popular commodity culture and, we may now add, in the world of clandestine pleasures. Aside from the photographic traces left by nineteenth-century "pimps, brothel keepers and respectable gentlemen hoping to slake their fearsome thirst for virgins" (Ovenden and Melville 7), there were also those photographers who aspired to make the use of the camera a respectable, and respected, art form.[37] Photographs of undressed girls functioned not to "reproduce the naked body, but to imitate some artist's view of what the naked body should be like" (Clark 4).

The professional photographer Oscar Gustave Rejlander, for example, photographed nudes as visual aids for artists.[38] Rejlander's approach to photographic representation draws heavily from the conventions of paintings and sculptures of nudes. His highly stylised photographs of the young girl, Charlotte Baker, for example, have been compared with the paintings of Jean-August Dominique Ingres. One can certainly see Ingres's mark of sensuousness in Rejlander's 1862 photograph, which is nicely titled "Mother's Clothes" (fig. 4:4). Kenneth Clark would say, in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, that by adorning the body in the conventions of high art, Charlotte Baker's body becomes "the body reformed" (1); that is, a "proper" nude. She, like Spence's street child, emerges from a dark background, which serves to emphasise the graceful lines of her body. With her elegant lines, and flowing tresses, she becomes a strikingly sensual figure. Charlotte Baker is, as well, coded with "safe" middle-class markers. The reference to her "mother" in the title implies an off-frame space of nurturant domesticity. The clean, well-tailored clothes lying

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[37] In France for example, Charles Baudelaire lamented the pernicious effects of photography, "the refuge of every would-be painter too ill-endowed or too lazy to complete his studies [...]," on the traditional visual arts: "I am convinced that the ill-applied developments of photography, like all other purely material developments of progress, have contributed much to the impoverishment of the French artistic genius, which is already so scarce" (112).

[38] Rejlander was responsible for several artistic developments in photography, as noted by his colleague, Henry Peach Robinson, in his essay titled "Oscar Gustave Rejlander."

Page 121 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:4, Oscar Gustave Rejlander's photograph, "Mother's Clothes" (1862); rpt. in Graham Ovenden and Robert Melville, *Victorian Children* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972) Plate 111.

next to her imply a scene of financial security. Her gaze, directed down and to the right, gives her a properly demure and modest air. Ovenden and Melville note, however, that Rejlander's photographs of Charlotte Baker "do not seem to provide the kind of information other artists might require" (3). Note how Charlotte wears nothing but a single stocking, while slipping on a long silk glove—a whiff of Parisian style titillation that would have pleased Sambourne.[39] Rejlander ambiguously mixes the iconography of female sexuality that ranged from the domestically demure to the prurient Parisian porn model.

When it comes to Victorian photographers, none shocks and perplexes more than Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), who is famous for having penned *Alice in Wonderland*, and is now more infamous for having photographed little girls. While critics and scholars have been fascinated by this perennial bachelor, mathematics don, Reverend at Christ Church, as well as writer of children's literature, it was not known, until the publication of Helmut Gernsheim's *Lewis Carroll, Photographer* in 1949, that he was also a passionate amateur photographer. And there was even more shock when, in 1978, Morten N. Cohen published four of Lewis Carroll's nude studies of his little girl friends. In 1867 or so, Cohen reveals, Carroll began to photograph "a veritable parade of nude children, mostly girls" (8) or, as Carroll would mention in his diaries, children posed "sans habillement [sic]," or "undraped" (qtd. in Cohen 8). For Cohen, photographing little girls in the nude was nothing more than an extension of Carroll's artistic experimentation with the camera. Before Carroll died, however, he destroyed the negatives and prints of his nude studies and requested that his executors destroy any others that may remain.[40]

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[39] Jean Baudrillard, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, offers a possible reason why Charlotte Baker's stocking is an erotic signifier: "The image of the stocking top on the thigh derives its erotic potential not from the proximity of the real genital and its *positive* promise [...], but from the apprehension surrounding the genitals (the panic of recognising castration) being *arrested in a staged castration*. The innocuous mark, the line of the stocking above which, instead of lack, ambivalence and the chasm, there is nothing more than a sexual plentitude. The naked thigh and, metonymically, the entire body has become a *phallic effigy* by means of this caesura, a fetishistic object to be contemplated and manipulated, deprived of all its menace" (102).

Carroll's photographs of his little friends, Alice Liddell included, have remained a point of contention and disquiet among fans and critics alike. As Mavor points out, the subject of Carroll's photographs makes critics "understandably uneasy. When they do touch upon the topic of his curious photographs, they tend to read not the pictures themselves, or the situation of the girl of the period, but rather Carroll. They want to make it clear that Carroll was not a Humbert Humbert" (7). Nabokov, however, at his acidulous best, notes that Carroll has

> a pathetic affinity with H. H. but some odd scruple prevented me from alluding in *Lolita* to his perversion and to those ambiguous photographs he took in dim rooms. He got away with it, as so many other Victorians got away with pederasty and nympholepsy. His were sad scrawny little nymphets, bedraggled and half-undressed, or rather semi-undraped, as if participating in some dusty and dreadful charade. (*Strong Opinions* 81)

The "odd scruple" that prevented Nabokov's direct allusion to Carroll's photography is the same odd scruple that plagues contemporary assessments of

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[40] The four nudes presented in Cohen's book may have avoided destructive hands because they are hand-painted photographs and, in the case of two, so heavily painted over that the burden of the referent barely lingers. One photograph is not a photograph at all, but a watercolour painting based on one of Carroll's nude studies.

Carroll's photographs. The beloved Lewis Carroll, writer of beloved children's literature, is, it seems, to remain as ideal and as sexless as the generations of children he has amused. The uneasiness felt by critics finds its way into a search for socially justifiable alibis for Carroll's photographs. Scholars such as Jan Gordon and Edward Guiliano, in their article, "From Victorian Textbook to Ready-Made: Lewis Carroll and the Black Art," claim that Carroll's photographs served to "open up [photography's] possibilities," and thus his achievement "can never be measured by a single photograph" (1). Gernsheim, the scholar responsible for starting the critical ruckus in the first place, when analysing the photographs at a closer range, claims that Carroll's photographs are infused with the same "friendship and love that had inspired the immortal Alice books [...]" (11). Ovenden and Melville, who sense the scandalous pleasure found in Carroll's photographs, note that "he created in his pictures of his little girl friends some of the most sensitive yet latently sexual images ever seen in art" but wholly "innocent in the true sense" (12). What makes Carroll's photographs so ambiguous is that all of these statements are accurate: Carroll's photographic practices participate in the complex and ever-changing definitions of childhood that circulated at the time, ranging from notions of pure sexual innocence to latent sexual depravity, or a mixture of both. Three photographs in particular reflect some of the attitudes that circulated around the concept of girlhood: a photograph of Xie Kitchin stages middle-class English innocence; a photograph of Florence Bickersteth invokes the threat of the incipient *femme fatale*; and the unambiguous nude odalisque, Evelyn Hatch, figures the sexually aware child.

Lewis Carroll's photographic exploration of childhood, like that of his contemporary, Rejlander, draws heavily from the conventions of painting in terms of composition and theme. Carroll designed his photographs, Dijkstra says, "the way one might compose a painting" (189), and especially, Dijkstra goes on to say, paintings that featured the enticements of the adult female body. Lindsay Smith, in her remarkable article, "Take Back Your Mink," argues that Carroll's obsession with little girls was a "visual compulsion" (384) in which his desire for any actual intimacy was displaced onto his photographs of miniature female bodies. As she says, "The tiny model ensures a negation of a real sexual union, whilst at the same time staging its possibility" (380).[41] Carroll's "eye" was the most eroticised part of his body and, as such, his photographs functioned as fetishes, "as memorials to a past fantasy" (Smith 381).

"Carroll," Higonnet argues, "was absolutely convinced that the innocence of the child was a natural quality, just as he was convinced that the truth of the photographic image was an automatic quality" (110). The photograph of Xie Kitchin (ca. 1875) (fig. 4:5) appears to confirm this view, at least the view that white, middle-class English girls were "naturally" innocent. Xie is posed asleep on a large, sumptuous sofa, barefoot in a white nightdress. The dark material of the sofa, and the

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[41] Herman Rapaport, in his article, "The Disarticulated Image: Gazing in Wonderland," suggests that the function of miniaturisation in Carroll's work acts as a form of neurotic inhibition, or restriction, in the Freudian sense; that is, Carroll's libidinal impulses found a substitute in the figure of the little girl (66-67). Freud noted, "When the substitutive impulse is carried out there is no sensation of pleasure; its carrying out has, instead, the quality of a compulsion" (qtd. in Smith 379). With Freud's hypothesis in mind, we can posit that Carroll's compulsion never led to impropriety, and his relationship with the girls was, as Ovenden and Melville suggest, "innocent in the true sense" (12). Florence Rush, as well, who supposedly can spot the paedophile just about everywhere, says that Carroll was a "different case," a "dirty old man" in "fantasy, perhaps, but not in fact" (59).

Page 126 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:5, Lewis Carroll's photograph of Xie Kitchin (ca. 1875); rpt. in Helmut Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll: Victorian Photographer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980) 51.

darker background, emphasise the pale whiteness of her skin and her nightdress. She is so still, so peaceful, and so white. Her pose brings to mind innumerable paintings of passive, non-threatening "innocent" women in the mid-nineteenth century, most of them posed asleep, dying or already dead. Dijkstra calls this visual convention the "sleep-death equation" (61) which offered the possibility of an unfettered, but morbid, voyeurism without the actual threat of female sexuality. Such placid images of sleeping (or safely dead) women shared much with images of the demure "angel in the house" (19) or the pale and sickly "consumptive sublime" (30) invalid.[42] The photograph of Xie Kitchin, however, is marked by a disquieting detail, or punctum. Xie's nightdress, all bunched up and in disarray, does not appear to have slipped off her shoulders accidentally, but is awkwardly pulled off her shoulders. Higonnet proposes that this is part of Carroll's artful "artlessness" that gives the photograph a sense of the "natural" spontaneity of not only the photographic session, but childhood itself (110). Yet there is an eroticism to this innocence, as Kincaid would argue. Carroll has included an inviting sensuality with his inclusion of this provocative "detail," a detail that subtly threatens the presumed asexual nature of the little girl's body.

Carroll also staged the "naturalness" of little girls by other means. He often used theatrical props and costumes with exotic, oriental motifs gleaned from England's colonies. He termed these sartorial markers of otherness "primitive costume" (qtd. in Cohen 8). Lorina and Alice Liddell, for example, were dressed as "Chinamen," and Irene MacDonald was posed as an exotic recumbent odalisque languishing among leopard skins, fur, and India shawls. For Carroll, as with many Victorians, "fantasies of other nationalities share a territory of 'naturalness' with photographs of upper-class English girls barefoot in nightdresses" (Smith 377).

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[42] In terms of nineteenth-century photographic fads, the photograph of Xie Kitchin also participates in the novelty for post-mortem photographs, where the deceased was most often portrayed as sleeping, or in a very lifelike pose (sitting in a chair for example), as a way to disavow not just the death of the subject, but the very idea of decomposition. See Judith Pike's article, "Poe and the Revenge of the Exquisite Corpse," for a discussion of post-mortem photography.

In Carroll's "diminutive romances" (*Lolita* 20), his obsession with smallness was of a gargantuan proportion. Smith notes that

> the fact that little girls grow 'bigger' is not only signified in his photographic preoccupations with the miniature. It is recorded also in the fact that he documented their growth in mathematical calibrations on the door of his rooms at Christ Church, and in the fact that references to height occur repeatedly in letters to 'child friends' and to their parents. (380)

To one of his little friends, Agnes Argles, he writes, "Some children have a most disagreeable way of getting grown-up: I hope you won't do anything of the sort before we meet again" (qtd. in Smith 380). The photograph of Florence Bickersteth (ca. 1865) (fig. 4:6) articulates Carroll's anxious fretting about girls "getting grown-up" by equating the little girl with a potential *femme fatale*. Florence is thematically and visually coded to be the perfidious Pandora of Greek myth whose "box," when opened, unleashed a host of miseries and woes into the world.[43] Florence's vacant eyes, her head of abundant flowing hair, and the box she absent-mindedly fondles

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[43] Like the Biblical Eve, the Greek Pandora was the first woman, devised by Zeus as a form of punishment for Prometheus's (and man's) transgressions. Pandora was created to be a beautiful and alluring virgin, but with a deceitful heart (*The New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* 93).

Page 129 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:6, Lewis Carroll's photograph of Florence Bickersteth (ca. 1865); rpt. in Helmut Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll, Photographer* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1949) Plate 54.

with her long and sensual fingers calls to mind Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1869 chalk drawing, *Pandora* (fig. 4:7).[44] As Nina Auerbach explains in her article, "Falling Alice, Fallen Women," "The force of growth compressed within his little women is one manifestation of the Pre-Raphaelite obsession with the latent powers of impassive womanhood" (52). Florence is leaning through a window, a symbolic space of transition and uncertainty, or perhaps "Lacan's *cadre du désire*" (Rapaport 66). Florence, a potential Victorian Pandora, has just enough insatiable girlish curiosity to actually open the box, when and if it ever catches her attention, and thereby unleash her adult, and "disagreeable," female sexuality.

Gordon and Guiliano argue that in Carroll's photographs, "The 'pose' rather than character or will is emphasized, and it is precisely because of his positioning, the allure of posture, that his photographs have earned him a reputation for sensuality in an age which invariably found ingenious means of repressing it" (13). In the case of the nude Evelyn Hatch (ca. 1878) (fig.4:8), very little sensuality is repressed. Her pose references numerous classical Venuses and odalisques, a pose that had been perfected by Alexandre Cabanel in his scandalously erotic painting, *The Birth of Venus* (c.1863). For Victorian audiences, such a pose was not ambiguous. Paintings

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[44] Carroll was an avid fan of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, and hovered around their circle, gleaning artistic guidelines that he would then apply to his photography. The Pre-Raphaelites (especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti) are noted for having inaugurated a figuration of female sexuality that contributed to solidifying the image of the *femme fatale* for visual culture (Allen 5). Jeffrey Stern's article, "Lewis Carroll the Pre-Raphaelite: 'Fainting in Coils'," details Carroll's involvement with the PRB.

Page 131 has been removed due to copyright restriction. The information removed was Figure 4:7, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's chalk drawing, *Pandora* (1869); rpt. in Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity* (New York: Harmony Books, 1988) Plate 21.

Page 132 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:8, Lewis Carroll's photograph of Evelyn Hatch (ca. 1878); rpt. in Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll, Photographer of Children: Four Nude Studies* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1979) Plate III, 19.

of nude Venuses, the Salon equivalent of the "pin-up," was a popular nineteenth-century form of titillation.[45] Regarding Carroll's photograph of Evelyn Hatch, Higonnet comments, "Then as now, her reclining odalisque pose clearly signalled adult and available feminine sexuality" (123). Unlike Salon nudes, however, Evelyn's gaze is not diverted to some off-frame space. Her pose and direct gaze are as challenging as Manet's *Olympia* (fig. 3:7), in which a desiring sexuality is figured on the female body, a young body that simultaneously invites objectification but resists appropriation.

Auerbach, in her study, *Romantic Imprisonment*, comments, "Since her sexuality is not imaged forth in foils, emblems, or metaphors, Carroll's Evelyn Hatch seems to me a far more healthily realized figure [...] for Evelyn Hatch is allowed to be at one with her own implied powers" (168). Mavor, too, notes that Evelyn Hatch is a figure that is "sexual, sexualized, innocent, childlike, and womanly" (14). Both Auerbach's and Mavor's comments are not simply modern-day readings of a photograph well over one hundred years old. Their comments have simply tapped into the complex, often contradictory, notions of girlhood that Carroll managed to stage in his photographs. Yet if Evelyn Hatch had been photographed in this "sexual, sexualized" manner in the late twentieth century, Auerbach and Mavor may have had something quite different to say.

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[45] See John Stammers's review of the Nov. 2001-Jan. 2002 Tate exhibition, "Exposed, The Victorian Nude," in which he notes the "thoroughly saucy" nature of these painted "Betty Grables" (94).

IV. Innocence Undressed in the Twentieth Century: David Hamilton and Sally Mann

> **All along, positively Romantic photographs of children have made possible negative images capable of provoking pity or outrage. Because the "normal" image of the child was Romantic innocence, any sign of deviation from innocence could be understood as violation. (Higonnet 117)**

> **The intrusion of proscribed or shocking realities into acceptable reality is one of the oldest tricks of photography, which might be defined as an art of conflicted response. (Steiner 41)**

Victorian photographers, and their "scrawny little nymphets," have left their traces in late-twentieth-century photography, most notably in the controversial work of David Hamilton and Sally Mann. These two provocative photographers manipulate, indeed "violate," conventional images of girlhood. British photographer David Hamilton's collection of photographs, titled *The Age of Innocence* (1995), and American photographer Sally Mann's collection, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (1988), are part of a visual continuum from the nineteenth century, as I mentioned earlier. Hamilton's "high-brow" idealising photographs have telling details gleaned from *femme fatale* iconography, as might be found in Carroll's staged masquerades, as well as a stylisation gleaned from erotica and pornography. Sally Mann, on the other hand, with her paradoxically domestic-cum-photojournalist technique, occasionally catches a twelve-year-old child (femme) fatale in a moment of sexual defiance or sexual abandon, thus utilising, and transforming, Carroll's technique of artful "artlessness" or "naturalness."

When V. Harger-Grinling and A. Thoms, in their article, "Robbe-Grillet and Balthus," claim that Balthus's paintings "have found their photographic realisation in the work of David Hamilton" (148), they may mean, simply, the obsessive repetition of young female bodies. More so than Balthus, however, Hamilton uses the "outmoded but modish language of visual repleteness" (32), as Nochlin called it, or what Kingsley termed "an immediately obsessive sexual content" (30). Hamilton's photographs of pubescent girls are "beautiful" in the most conventional sense of the term. In terms of formal properties, Barthes might have termed them "unary" or "banal" photographs; that is, they have "no duality, no indirection, no disturbance" (*Camera Lucida* 41). Hamilton's relentless soft-focus technique and perfect compositional style are as visually replete as glossy magazine advertisements. The title of Hamilton's collection, *The Age of Innocence*, is aptly lifted from Joshua Reynolds's famous Romantic painting, also titled *The Age of Innocence*, which depicts the ideal emblem of innocent girlhood. Hamilton reworks the theme of Reynold's painting by adding a few years to the girl's age and then, of course, not-so-innocently undressing her.

Art critic Anna Douglas notes that Hamilton identifies "with the long-standing tradition of nude child portraiture in fine art [...] ("Childhood" 18). Douglas, however, neglects to include the ambiguous "nude studies" of sexually aware street waifs and brothel occupants gathered together by J. T. Withe in the nineteenth century. This is not to say that Hamilton's photographs stray far from socially sanctioned artistic and photographic practices, but there are, in fact, two traditions at work in Hamilton's photography: the desire to portray "the physical and spiritual beauty of each subject" (Douglas, "Childhood" 18), as well as the soft-core pornographic and/or the erotic.[46] To add a legitimate guide to his erotic exploration of virgin soil, his photographs, in the tradition of the 1855 and 1857 London Photographic Society's published collections, are accompanied by literary quotes (Sieberling and Bloore 12). Hamilton uses some the most suggestive quotes he can find, uttered by the likes of Saint Augustine, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde and the mysterious "Anon," among many others. And Hamilton's photographic strategy includes references to traditional nudes with their acceptably high-brow poses: the figures often echo languid Pre-Raphaelite maidens (without their medieval robes), nude Ophelias wearing nothing but flowers in their hair, or pubescent versions of Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus*, who gaze narcissistically into mirrors, for example. All echo, in one way or another, nineteenth-century modes of representing female sexuality, virginal or otherwise.

His official web-site is prefaced by his comment that a "distinction must be made between eroticism and pornography: the media have blurred the disparity to an unforgivable degree. For those intelligent enough to recognize the difference, erotica will continue to hold a unique fascination. Social evils should not be confused with the pursuit of true beauty." At one point in *Lolita*, Humbert provides a brief discourse on the "pursuit of true beauty" and its relationship not only to his Romantic agony, but to the erotic. Humbert's theory can equally apply to Hamilton's photographic strategies. For Humbert, a "fiery phantasm" can accidentally turn a man reading a newspaper into a "half-naked nymphet stilled in the act of combing her Alice-in-Wonderland hair" (264). The attractiveness of Hamilton's young figures does not reside in the "limpidity of pure young forbidden fairy child beauty," as Humbert calls it, but in a transformative projection where the "infinite perfections" of photographic techniques and the photograph's formal properties can "fill the gap between the little given and the great promised" (264). Humbert's version of the erotic is "the great rosegray never-to-be-had" (264), or "the paradox of ideal vision wedded to sheer impossibility" (Pifer 68).

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[46] The soft-core elements have been pointed out by Stephen Schiff and A. M. Holmes in *Nerve Magazine*'s "VoiceBox" session, "Politicizing Puberty." Furthermore, Hamilton's collection, *Twenty Five Years as an Artist* (1998), was deemed to be child pornography by a California judge during a trial for possession of child pornography. The defendant possessed photocopied pages from Hamilton's book which he had checked out of the San Diego library. The judge declared that the images were "not art for art's sake but for sexual purposes" ("Judge" 17). What also may contribute to Hamilton's dubious reputation is that one can find his photographs in published collections (four that were for "limited" circulation), as well as on the Internet. At Hamilton's official web-site, one can become a member of a private club, for $10.00 (US) per month, and can have unlimited access to exclusive "members only" pages and the "picture gallery," where new photographs of nubile maidens are added monthly.

As if to illustrate the pursuit of true beauty wedded to the taboo, Hamilton's perfectly composed, perfectly lit, black and white photograph of pubescent "Eves" (fig. 4:9) invokes the Biblical invective against transgression, the curious allure of the taboo or forbidden, and the frightful "fall" that invariably ensues. These "virginal" pre-fall Eves are figured as themselves forbidden *fruit vert*, child (femmes) fatales situated in a pseudo-Biblical scene of temptation, complete with fruit in their hands. The leaves in the upper right corner of the composition hint at that notorious Edenic tree of knowledge of good and evil (snake not required). One Eve appears to have just picked the fruit (her sexuality, that is), and is contemplating its use-value, while the other figure gazes off-frame, ready to proffer her fruit to some Adam who may

Page 138 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:9, David Hamilton's untitled black and white photograph (1995); rpt. in David Hamilton, *The Age of Innocence* (London: Aurum Press, 1995) 149.

happen along. "Of rosy youths and virgins fair, / Ripe as the melting fruits they bear…" Thomas Moore poetically croons in an off-stage voice. Their bodies are posed to illustrate both "ripe" and "melting" adolescent female sexuality. Thematically, by drawing an iconographic parallel to the Biblical Eve, the photograph allegorises the taboo and transgressive aspect of "the great promised."

Douglas complains that Hamilton, like Graham Ovenden and Jock Sturges, is "[a]ware of but resistant to a critical revisionism […]." He chooses to "defend an artistic legacy and, in doing so, relegates [his] subjects to erotic objects of vision" ("Childhood" 18). When Hamilton's girls have their arms up and clasped behind their heads, peel off their shirts, allow their filmy dresses to slide to the floor, or masturbate, the figures and the compositional strategies appear to be gleaned from a *Playboy* centrefold, the ultimate "erotic object of vision." Take, for example, one of Hamilton's colour photographs in which the image is blatantly erotically coded (fig. 4:10). Here, the imagination has even less gap to fill between "the little given" and "the great promised." The stretch of the girl's arched back, her raised arms, half-closed eyes, parted lips and the not-so-subtle finger in the mouth, apparently illustrate a stanza from a poem by John Dryden, that begins, "Take me, take me, some of you," and closes with the line, "Heave my breasts, and roll my eyes." Both the suggestive pose and the suggestive text figure the girl as akin to the scandalous Traci Lords who, in the early 1980s, posed nude for lewd magazines when she was fourteen years old.

And while the interplay between the images and the literary quotations articulate unruly pleasures, Hamilton's entire collection is framed by liberal-minded discourses that only nudge at the frames of acceptability, but do not cross them. In

Page 140 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:10, David Hamilton's untitled colour photograph (1995); rpt. in David Hamilton, *The Age of Innocence* (London: Aurum Press, 1995) 83.

writer Liliane James's Introduction, lesbian encounters are relegated to the "first hint of desire for a boy" (8); fantasies of sexual intimacy are part of the "eternal search for the perfect male" (9); the "awe and admiration" she feels when examining her body in a mirror, her recognition of that "infinite potential," will allow her to eventually "fulfil her female role" (9). The closing photographs involve seaside scenes with "the perfect male," no doubt, and with whom the paradoxically erotic virgin ever so mistily becomes a virgin no more. Hamilton's photographs of young girls in all their erotic, sometimes campy, glory allow us the pleasure of the scandalous, a peek-through-the-fingers look at the forbidden or taboo visual territory that we imagine lurks at the heart of those "Other Victorian" pleasures enjoyed by J. T. Withe and his ilk. And of course the pleasure gleaned from Hamilton's somewhat scandalous approach to adolescent sexuality is, as we shall soon see, a key motif used by fashion advertising, especially when provocatively written text accompanies a provocative image.

What the typical Romantic painting of a young girl depicts is a body that does not "tell any story about adult life. [...] the children deny, or enable us to forget, many aspects of adult society" (Higonnet 23). Hamilton's photographs, because they operate within idealising paradigms of adolescence, say little about adult life (but much about adult imaginations). Sally Mann's photographs, on the other hand, "have aroused the most acute controversy because they deal with exactly those aspects of the child's body that Romantic childhood denied" (Higonnet 206). In *Immediate Family* (1992), for example, Mann photographed her own three children, Emmett, Jessie and Virginia, covered in Popsicle drips, lying in urine soaked sheets, lounging near vomit or swinging from hayhooks. In these black and white photographs, rather than perfectly plump, clean, well-behaved, and smiling children, her children are never "prettified" for the camera. Such a strategy has provoked criticism that her photographs aestheticise child abuse or are exploitative (Douglas, "Childhood" 17).[47] *Immediate Family*, as Douglas notes, "acknowleges nineteenth century traditions of childhood symbolism. However, she brings to this arcadian vision the chanciness and edginess of American photojournalists like Weegee and Diane Arbus" ("Childhood" 17).

Mann's photographs of numerous twelve-year old girls in *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women*, an earlier collection of black and white photographs, also participate in the nineteenth-century visual tradition of childhood, but more specifically, representations of femininity. Her photographs, like those of Lewis Carroll, are really quite remarkable for those stray details or features that throw the concept of idealised girlhood innocence into disarray. Some girls are pimple-faced, and fading into the wallpaper; another is overweight, slumped on a sofa; a tutu-clad girl on crutches nurses a broken foot; an "ideal" little girl in a frilly dress, and holding a doll, looks stern as her mother reaches down to pull something out of her hair. As writer Ann Beattie says in her introductory essay, "We Are Their Mirror, They Are Ours," a girl can appear to be "an abstraction" or a "figure of speech" (9): "wallflower" and "couch potato" come to mind. Because Mann's photographs are of girls of one specific age, her approach resembles that of a *National Geographic* photo-study of a unique species of animal or of a remote tribe of people.

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[47] Oxenhandler, in her article, "Nole Me Tangere," notes some of the reasons why Mann's photographs provoke, in her, thoughts of conquered and oppressed people and, in one particular photograph, of child abuse. As she says, there is "something distinctly noir in these photographs, something with teeth that lurks in even the dreamiest of them" (par. 8). See also Val Williams's article, "Fragile Innocence," and Susan Edwards's article, "Pretty Babies: Art, Erotica or Kiddy Porn?"

In an interview with Douglas, Mann states, "I am particularly interested in the complexity of emotion which was why I was fascinated by twelve-year-olds" ("Blood Ties" 20). Mann further articulates the complexity of her photographic subjects in *At Twelve* with the comment,

> She is the very picture of contradiction; on the one hand diffident and ambivalent, on the other forthright and impatient; half pertness and half pout. She disarms me with her sure sense of her own attractiveness and, with it, her direct, even provocative approach to the camera. Impossibly, she is both artless and sophisticated; a child and yet a woman. (14)

Remarkably, this is the very definition of Lolita in popular culture, a girl who is "half pertness and half pout" both "artless and sophisticated" a "child" who is also a "a woman." Philip Martin, in his essay, "Once, Twice, Three Times Lolita," describes popular culture's Lolita as, "This pouting vixen, this firm yet yielding archetype, this sexy virgin at once available for inspection and independent of her audience: this is Lolita" (par. 8).

Mann's approach to images of girlhood, as with images of Lolita-types in fashion advertising, produces a complex tangle of off-frame emotions and fears. This is often achieved by manipulating the visual rhetoric of a girl's sexual innocence through subtle references to famously complex *femmes fatales* of painting. Take, for example, the image of a girl in a bathing suit, lounging across a lawn chair (fig. 4:11).

Page 144 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:11, Sally Mann's untitled black and white photograph (1988); rpt. in Sally Mann, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (New York: Aperture, 1988) 16.

She semi-reclines like a backyard *Olympia* (fig. 3:7), which is echoed in the placement of her hand, her legs almost crossed at her ankles, and her body held taut and semi-upright. She looks at the camera with a gaze that is defiantly resistant, accusatory, and yet awkwardly petulant. It is as though she has been photographed in a moment of moodiness worthy of Humbert's Lolita.

Beattie comments that the girls in Mann's photographs "have been positioned in blatant or symbolic contexts" (8). For example, the photograph of a girl lost in auto-erotic sexual abandon (fig. 4:12), what Steiner, in her book, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, would call an "image of innocent corruption" (46), employs numerous visual rhetorical devices from images of *femmes fatales*: the urban artificiality of her make-up, the ribbon tied around her neck, her dress suggestively sliding off of her shoulder, and the phallic bottle of diet pop clutched next to her body. The fluttering veils suggests that she is a dancing Salome, or a delicately veiled Marlene Dietrich as filmed by Joseph von Sternberg. Because the symbolism is rather forthright, the allegorical structures that make us "imagine her future" (Beattie 10) are evoked. Both of these photographs play with the notion of an image of a girl as a "cautionary tale" in which vaguely familiar visual rhetorical devices found in images of *femmes fatales* inform the viewer that a "maternal future does not emanate from these children's bodies" (Higonnet 204). Mann's resistance to picturing girls as essentially maternal or nurturant, by photographing them as child (femmes) fatales, more so than any painting of an Olympia, or a triumphant Salome, seems to provide photographic documentation of the fact that twelve-year olds can be anything but ideal or innocent, or that they are very much a part of the corrupt world of adults.

Page 146 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:12, Sally Mann's untitled black and white photograph (1988); rpt. in Sally Mann, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (New York: Aperture, 1988) 33.

As we saw in the previous chapter, and to quote Pointon again, "what makes paintings of young girls exciting and visually significant is the contrast between that presumed innocence and something that might generally be understood to endanger it" (181-182). The same principle of contrast between the "presumed innocence" of the girl, and the sense that her innocence is imperilled is a peculiar punctum, or off-frame emotion, operating in Mann's photographs. Beattie claims that though the young girls inhabit a world created by adults, there is very little control over how the girls appropriate the props and pleasures of that world. She states, "These girls have seen enough of the postures and affectations of adults to approximate or mimic them successfully. [...] Is the world in which the girls exist really an innocent world in which a pose is only a pose?" (9). In other words, the question is whether or not these girls, who offered themselves up to the camera, and thus became objects in the process, can handle what their "adult" affectations might solicit. Beattie's comment slips into a pseudo-Rousseauesque discourse where the presumed innocence of the girls is threatened by the pernicious effects of the adult world. Steiner provocatively probes this dilemma further by asking, "Are there not poses that are reality?" (47). In other words, is it possible to "accept the possibility that there is no such disparity [between our thoughts and theirs, our response and their intention], that our belief in it springs from a desperate fiction of innocence that we displace onto these children" (48). The fears and anxieties that Mann's photographs generate depend to a large extent on the notion that twelve-year-old girls are automatically innocent and therefore in need of protection.

In a vein similar to Steiner's question, Noelle Oxenhandler, in her essay, "Nole Me Tangere," asks, "Which is really the more dangerous vision of children: the one that presents them to us, scrubbed and cute among flowers, as décor, accessory? Or the one that acknowledges the edges we walk on?" (par. 16). It is in late-twentieth-century fashion photography that a direct confrontation with "the edges we walk on" is articulated. The Lolita-like girls who play the ultimate dress-up in "mother's clothes," in their artless poses and affectations, combined with their "sure sense of [their] own attractiveness" and their direct connection to commodity culture and style, embody numerous *fin-de-siècle* fears about contemporary culture itself. The edge that society walks on becomes, in fashion photography, a dramatically provocative marketing strategy.

V. "Chic Dolly": Fashion Advertising at the *Fin de siècle*

> **[...] Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead. (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 32)**

> **The majority, anxious to be inconspicuous in unimaginative mediocrity, seems to have for its leading style a laboured rococo, with bewildering oblique lines, incomprehensible swellings, puffings, expansions and contradictions, folds with irrational beginning and aimless ending, [...] and which cause women's bodies to resemble now a beast of the Apocalypse [...]. (Nordau 8)**

> **Culture is nothing if not thrifty, recycling and retooling these myths for our own fin de siecle. (D'Erasmo 40)**

"Kate Moss. She spooks me" (40), says Stacey D'Erasmo in her essay "Poison Flower Child." Kate Moss, who first appeared in 1990 on the cover of *The Face*, "heralded a revolution" (40) in fashion advertising and inaugurated a *fin-de-siècle* wave of creatures who were called "Lolitas" or "Lolita-like." The Amazonian babes of the 1980s, such as Cindy Crawford, or towering drag queens, such as RuPaul, were suddenly usurped by the waif, the impure virgin, the sickly girl strung-out on "heroin chic," and the naughty, but very angry, "riot grrl." But Kate Moss is, as D'Erasmo points out, "an icon collaged out of old icons" (40). Take, for example, Kate Moss posing (drooping, really) for Calvin Klein's "Obsession for men" eau de toilette (fig. 4:13). The dirty stucco background conjures an even dirtier inner city landscape. Her moist messy hair, her vacantly dead eyes, and slightly parted hungry lips evoke any number of female vampires, "virgins who could at any minute turn succubi [...]" (D'Erasmo 40). The way her tank top has "accidentally" slid off of her thin, pale arms is both inviting and creepy. Moss's visage seems to be recycled from images such as Spence's "Street Child," combined with a bit of Carroll's artful artlessness, and works within the same tradition as Hamilton's and Mann's ambiguously sensual, and sexualised, girls. The pleasures of commodity culture become brutal pleasures in which "eau de toilet" for men is associated with the smell of cultural decay. An urgent, edgy question lurks here: Is the "Obsession" really an "eau de toilette," or a nineteenth-century obsession, where "respectable gentlemen" hope "to slake their fearsome thirst for virgins" (Ovenden and Melville 7)? The advertisement simultaneously plays with the notion of the photograph as a fetish, and

Page 150 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:13, Kate Moss for Calvin Klein's "Obsession for men"; *Maclean's* (June 14, 1999) Front Advertisement Insert.

the notion of a little "mignon": Kate Moss posed as an urban foundling ready to be fondled.

Of course, in this advertisement Moss is older, a "dead leaf echo," as Humbert would say. What made her so appealing in the first place is still evident. She has a bit of coltish awkwardness, an uncertainty before the camera, as if Sally Mann's camera caught her on a "bad-hair" day. Most of the Lolita-like models who followed in Moss's wake were similarly rumpled and dishevelled and often downright naughty. They were pastiches of the nineteenth-century consumptive invalids, clinging vines and ravenously poisonous women so thoroughly documented by Dijkstra in *Idols of Perversity*. "Set next to our dreams of innocence," as Jim McClellan points out in his article "Lolita: The Phenomenon," "they seem damaged, dangerous even" (66).

In order to examine the twentieth century's *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about "damaged and dangerous" girls, it is important to examine style as defined by surfaces and commodities. Style, it can be argued, whether in art, architecture or fashion photography, is one of the primary gauges of a society's preoccupation. Ewen argues, "Alongside style's capacity to express personal longings and individual identity is its ability to encode and transmit social values and ideas. In today's consumer cultures, where style prevails as a dominant form of currency, style presents people with many ways of seeing and comprehending society" (*All Consuming Images* 112). One way of comprehending contemporary society is as a *fin-de-siècle* society, and one that remarkably resembles a decadent, and worried, turn of the nineteenth century. To create a style reminiscent of the turn of the nineteenth century, gutted bits of visual currency are appropriated, recycled, and transformed into advertising images.

In an advertising image, as Barthes points out in *The Responsibility of Forms*, "signification is assuredly intentional [...] if the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are replete, formed with a view to the best possible reading: the advertising image is *frank*, or at least emphatic" (22). Marketing, promotion and advertising, more so than any other area of contemporary visual culture, has its fingers placed directly on the pulse of the society in which it circulates. Advertising knows what will work most effectively on its audience, based on market research and precise visual calibrations. Advertising manages to simultaneously reflect social desires, reshape those desires, and create new ones. The "frank" or "emphatic" nature of the advertising image offers to fill "the gap between the little given and the great promised" (*Lolita* 264) with a product, an article of clothing, or even a style. Kate Moss, the desirable waif, enhances "the desiring relation between commodity and consumer" (Stratton 36). Because Kate Moss is so desirable, yet "so miserably unattainable" (*Lolita* 239), "Obsession" eau de toilette will happily slip into the scene of seduction.

Kevin Kollenda, a model agent for Take 2, calls the Lolita syndrome in fashion advertising "innocence reborn": "There is a *woman* inside her that comes out. And I think that's *needed* in the photos, because otherwise it would look like a little girl wearing Mommy's clothes or wearing some older woman's clothes. There is the *knowing* in her eyes, the awareness of her womanhood, of her sexuality [...]" (qtd. in Paglia, "Lolita Unclothed" 150). McClellan posits that the appeal of waifish, gawky "semi-anorexic androgyne" models "who don't play to the camera so obviously" is more than just "keeping it real," or functioning as "a hip deviation from prevailing norms" (66). McClellan argues that the potency of these images is derived from the fact that they "edge into murky territory, the way they nudge away at taboos, blur boundaries we'd like to kid ourselves were nice and clear" (66). As Kollenda unwittingly implies, an "innocence reborn" is, in actuality, an ambiguity. That is to say, the boundaries that previously existed between girlhood and womanhood, between the asexually unconscious girl and the sexually aware girl, in fact, the division between ideal innocence and tawdry corruption become for McClellan a "murky territory." As we saw with Die Brücke paintings of Marcella and Fränzi, *fin-de-siècle* cultural uncertainty and chaos is best articulated by the blurring of boundaries.

Cultural historian Michael Slaven, in his article, "Jailbait at the Millennium," suggests that the use of young models have shaped "our patterns of consumption and desire. They are often portrayed as sexualised beings, capable of seduction or destruction, and have thus become a powerful metaphor for the uncertainties of our identity as a culture" (16).[48] The Lolita Phenomenon, as a twentieth-century *fin-de-siècle* metaphor for cultural uncertainty, is tellingly revealed in an image of fifteen-year-old Lonneke Engle modelling for Guess (fig. 4:14). She languorously poses against a wall in a seductive posture, while her tousled Messalina tendrils pour around her body. She is "La belle dame sans merci," the seductive destroyer. Her heavily

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[48] For a discussion of how the concept of children and youth have shaped patterns of consumption, see Stuart Ewen's book, *Captains of Consciousness*, especially his chapter titled "Youth as an Industrial Ideal" (pp. 139-149).

Page 154 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:14, Lonneke Engle for Guess. Feature Advertisement; rpt. in *Esquire*, British Edition (April 1997) 3.

lined eyes are vampiric, her darkened lips are predatory. She is a modern-day vamp who consumes both men and material goods to excess. Her image provokes a response that vacillates between desire and disgust, in an adult audience at any rate.

Indeed, this image of Lonneke Engle was used to market Guess clothing to teenagers, specifically those who identify with "riot grrl" alternative musical groups such as Hole and Bikini Kill who, in their lyrics and on their album covers, aggressively denounce the associations made between femininity and "cute little girls" (Higonnet 193). Lonneke Engle is figured here as anything but a cute little girl with a safely domesticated femininity. Rather, she is figured as pure girlhood rebellion, semiotically dressed in everything that adults fear the most about uncontrollable young girls who symbolically represent the unfolding future. Lonneke is figured as a child (femme) fatale who, unlike the sentimental Romantic image of girlhood, does not "deny, or enable us to forget, many aspects of adult society" (Higonnet 23). The advertisement for Guess simultaneously addresses the target market of teenage girls, and the larger adult society who cling to frail and desperate fictions about girlhood innocence. Lonneke Engle's visage is one that glamorises adult fears about decay and decadence just as the figure of the *femme fatale* did at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The visual correlation between *fin-de-siècle* art and the various fashion images and advertisements is significant "not just at the level of exact pictorial correspondence," as John Berger says in *Ways of Seeing*, but "at the level of the sets of signs used" (138). There is a certain visual sophistication in the fashion advertisements and images examined here. Poses, details, sometimes the nearduplication of a work of art, not only create "The Beauty of the Medusa" (25), as Mario Praz calls it in his book, *The Romantic Agony*, but act as reflections of larger social anxieties. Kate Moss, the sickly succubus, Lonneke Engle, the predatory vamp, and Devon Aoki, the "petite coquette" who opened this chapter, are familiar insofar as culture's visual memory recognises the covert or overt appropriation of the image of the *femme fatale*. The images also derive their ideological verisimilitude from present-day concerns about thoroughly corrupt young girls: girls who have been corrupted by sex, rebellion, the impersonal city, and technology. They are bodies emblazoned with cultural detritus.

If we return to the baby coquette, Devon Aoki, in the 1999 *Harper's Bazaar* fashion spread which was photographed by Patrick Demarchelier, the glamorous disgust produced by the image of child (femme) fatale is overtly expressed by making intertextual references to famous *fin-de-siècle* artists and paintings. In a close-up photograph of Devon modelling a gown by Emanuel Ungaro (fig. 4:15), her hair swirls about her head like Medusa's hypnotic snake-like tendrils. Her claustrophobic proximity, the flatness of the image, and the metallic material of her dress, resemble any number of Gustav Klimt's gilded water snakes, destructive maidens and castrating idols of feminine perfidy. In another stunning image that directly quotes *fin-de-siècle* art and fashion, Devon, modelling a dress by Gaultier, is referred to as a "mermaid," who "sweeps into the room with her elaborately feathered tail" (172) (fig. 4:16). The "silk satin bustier gown with shaved feather print and multicolored ostrich-feather hem" (172) is a direct quotation of Aubrey Beardsley's illustration, "The Peacock Skirt," for Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (fig. 4:17). Aubrey Beardsley, Page 157 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:15, Patrick Demarchelier's photograph of Devon Aoki for Emanuel Ungaro. Fashion Feature: "Haute Couture," *Harper's Bazaar* (April, 1999) 174.

Page 158 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:16, Patrick Demarchelier's photograph of Devon Aoki for Jean Paul Gaultier. Fashion Feature: "Haute Couture," *Harper's Bazaar* (April, 1999) 173.

Page 159 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 4:17, Aubrey Beardsley's ink illustration, *The Peacock Skirt* (1894); Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* (London: John Lane Company, 1912) Face page 2.

who is most closely associated with the nineteenth-century spirit of *fin-de-siècle* decadence, created some of the most memorable images of depraved and perverse *femmes fatales*. In both of these *haute couture* images of Devon Aoki, as with the image I noted at the beginning of this chapter, her impassive face and her cold beauty violates and wounds the studium most profoundly.

References to turn-of-the-nineteenth-century iconography of female depravity are paradoxically employed to give the fashions a patina of desirability. As Berger comments, it may be that those who develop publicity and advertising strategies, by using quotations from works of art, understand the tradition of visual art (especially painting) far better than do art historians (135). Advertisers are thus able to use the richness of implied meanings and cultural influence to present a flattering display of consumer goods. Berger argues, "Any work of art 'quoted' by publicity serves two purposes. Art is a sign of affluence; it belongs to the good life; it is part of the furnishing which the world gives to the rich and the beautiful" (135). *Haute couture* is very much a part of the world of the beautiful and wealthy, and thus the appropriation of works of art for both the fashion spread, and the fashions themselves, is not incomprehensible. Quotations from *fin-de-siècle* paintings that employed *femmes fatales* as embodiments of cultural uncertainty do, however, require further consideration.

Devon Aoki, posed as a living work of art, a *tableau vivant* inspired by Rops, Klimt or Beardsley, seems to be a well-studied ironic comment on the "good life" and the "rich and the beautiful." In a period of economic uncertainty, Devon Aoki's impassive and cold face echoes the perception that the world of the affluent is impassive and cold. This world has, like the girl's face, an indifference, a remoteness, a lack of human feeling and, like the girl's body, is absolutely unattainable. Devon Aoki also resembles the "fashionable *femmes fatales*," or "Social Princesses," at the turn of the nineteenth century, such as Lillian Russell, Consuelo Vanderbilt, Sarah Bernhardt and Lillie Langtry, who conspicuously and excessively dressed in their "fickle fashions," as Marsicano points out, in order to "divert attention away from more significant social problems [...]" (143). The fashionable *femme fatale* embodied and personified "the outwardly alluring, glittering but dangerous Western city [...]" (155), and like the modern city the fashionable *femme fatale* "is unable to feel; yet she can be a charming predator" (155). The impassive, unfeeling child (femmes) fatales in fashion advertising are post-modern bodies that do more than "glamorize the worst excesses of adulthood" (Slaven 18); they also comment on these excesses in a direct way. Like a painting, the photographic image can transform a real body into a carnivalesque embodiment of cultural excess. And excessive bodies, or unruly bodies, are difficult to control and manage. As Higonnet states, "Unlike Romantic children who are arranged and presented as a delightful spectacle to be enjoyed, Knowing children are neither available or controllable" (210-211).

But what, exactly, can be said about a society that produces advertisements that glamorise the demise of innocence as a form of style? If there actually was a nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* style, it would be one that was "a significant expression of an age in crisis, confused about its own identity, its own *state of mind*" (Ewen, *All Consuming Images* 121). The fascination and alarm we sense when presented with photographs of the child (femme) fatale are the result of an alarmed state of mind, especially in a society that feels it has lost all ability to control both the present and the future. The photographic record of girls, the collected visual survey, contains images that provoke off-frame collective responses that echo Max Nordau's 1895 best-seller, *Degeneration*: "Things as they are totter and plunge, and they are suffered to reel and fall, because man is weary, and there is no faith that is worth an effort to uphold them" (5-6). The more corrupt society becomes, so it goes, the greater the threat to the very young. There also lurks the fear that corrupted childhood innocence will only beget further cultural decay. The logic of *fin-de-siècle* decadence is the continual downward spiral of corruption and decay. Bernheimer, in his article, "The Decadent Subject," points out that

> the notion of decadence cannot stand alone. Its meaning is oppositional: some standard must be posited in relation to which a falling away, decay, or deterioration can be defined. This positive norm often is not explicitly recognized, since it consists in a society's unquestioned assumptions about what is natural, good, right, progressive, and so forth. (53)

In present-day culture, the standard of what is natural, good and right is the image of the ideal innocent girl. The child (femme) fatale in photography, however, like the *femme fatale* in the late nineteenth century, provokes a sensation equivalent to the "totter and plunge," or the "reel and fall," of a weary society.

McClellan comments that when looking at these various photographs of young girls in advertising, one feels an incredible sense of melancholy, for the youthful ideal is simultaneously celebrated and spoiled (69). It is the same melancholy that haunts Humbert who, after his hotel tryst with Lolita, confesses that he feels an "oppressive, hideous constraint as if I were sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" (*Lolita* 140). Photographic images themselves function as "small ghosts," for the photograph has been linked to death in many different ways. Barthes likens photography to a motionless "primitive theater" in which "we see the dead" (*Camera Lucida* 32). Susan Sontag, too, in her book, *On Photography*, notes that photography is "an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos" (15). Photographs become "momento mori" that "testify to time's relentless melt" (15). In the case of David Hamilton, Sally Mann, and especially fashion photography, however, the child (femme) fatale is figured not just to "testify," but to visually thematise the very notion of "time's relentless melt," and to produce the sense of "pathos" that marks or wounds the *fin de siècle*'s own relentless melt into an uncertain future. She, with her sexuality, petulance and social disobedience, sits next to the off-frame "small ghost" of a nostalgically remembered concept of ideal Romantic girlhood. The Lolita Phenomenon in photography simply exacerbates, or makes more poignant, a feeling of cultural melancholy.

Whereas a photograph can function as a fetish, or a bit of "momento mori," film, as Metz argues, has the ability to give "back to the dead a semblance of life, a fragile semblance but one immediately strengthened by the wishful thinking of the viewer" (84). Humbert, when remembering Lolita playing tennis, recalls how the "exquisite clarity of all her movements had its auditory counterpart in the pure ringing sound of her every stroke" (*Lolita* 231). It is both movement and sound that would have restored a semblance of life to his dead nymphet. Humbert, wishing that he had been more of a filmmaker than a photographer, laments, "That I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantments, immortalized in segments of celluloid, makes me moan to-day with frustration. They would have been so much more than the snapshots I burned!" (232). Humbert is no Lewis Carroll; he is not satisfied with pocket-sized fetishes that are inadequate memorials to his fantasies. The nymphet must be in motion.

The subject of the chapter which follows is an examination of how Humbert's cinematic fantasy of restoring a semblance of life to Lolita manifests in Hollywood cinema. I examine the two film adaptations of Nabokov's novel, the first by Stanley Kubrick, and the latter by Adrian Lyne. Rather than limiting myself to these two films alone, I situate the two adaptations within a larger discussion of the historical and cultural context that informs the figuration of the nymphet in mainstream narrative film. I argue that these numerous celluloid nymphets, as with nymphets in painting and photography, are directly related to larger cultural anxieties that circulate around the concept of girlhood at each moment in time. The cinematic Lolita, with all her "enchantments," challenges the screen personae of wholesome starlets such as tiny Shirley Temple or young Elizabeth Taylor. As we shall see, both Kubrick's and Lyne's nymphets, along with the particularly nasty versions of the demon nymphet in the films of the 1990s, are, in many ways, the *femme fatale* of *film noir* revisited.

Chapter Five: Sacred Monsters of the Cinema

> **The cinema is a natural idiom for illustrating the magic of the Lolita myth. (Sinclair 7)**
>
> **Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair! (*Lolita* 231)**
>
> **I use to be Snow White but I drifted. (Mae West)**

I.

In 1962, Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* was released. The promotional poster for the film featured a close-up of actress Sue Lyon, as Lolita, sucking on a lollipop and peering over those now notorious heart-shaped sunglasses (fig. 5:1). Lolita's sunglasses were at once a form of veiling and a provocation. The image of the girl-child appeared to be in disguise, an enigma lurking behind those sunglasses. Here was a girl who could finally return the gaze of a society that had spent at least two centuries gazing at her. Like Nabokov's novel, Kubrick's film presented a new form of "corruption," to use Camille Paglia's word, and Lolita's sunglasses signalled yet another transformation in popular culture's image of girlhood. Until Lolita made her cinematic debut, Hollywood had been awash in a sea of perfect little girls, from Shirley Temple of the 1930s, to later starlets such as Judy Garland, Deanna Durbin, and Elizabeth Taylor of the 1940s. The Hollywood nymphet of 1962, however, was the "evil other" to a long tradition of ideal girls. Kubrick's *Lolita* created a space in which popular culture's iconic Lolita—that bubble-gum-chewing, trashy, *ingénue*—could exist. Cinema would be the primary

Page 166 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 5:1, the promotional poster for Stanley Kubrick's film, *Lolita* (MGM, 1962); rpt. in Richard Corliss, *Lolita* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994) 2.

vehicle for popular culture to let this sexy Lolita into the "sanitised space of childhood" (Walkerdine 170). This Lolita was no innocent but, rather, something more glamorous, daring and dangerous—like a petite Mae West or a little Marlene Dietrich—and Kubrick's film, like Nabokov's novel, would be the Peyton Place of childhood.

Critic Marianne Sinclair makes the claim, in her remarkable study of cinema's girl stars and starlets, *Hollywood Lolita: The Nymphet Syndrome in the Movies*, that the Lolita figure in film is "as old as cinema itself" (11). She cites such early precursors as Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Mary Miles Minter, Mary Pickford and Shirley Temple. Yet if, as I have been arguing, the Lolita figure in popular culture is a type of child (femme) fatale, a demon nymphet with a twofold nature, then her precursors must also include Hollywood's vamps, tramps and fast-talking dames. Film, like all cultural forms, has documented a veritable tug-of-war between the two poles of femininity, between the virtuous virgin and the *femme fatale*, in the cultural psyche. Whenever feminine virtue and wide-eyed innocence is over-emphasised, the *femme fatale* appears "as a return of the repressed" (Paglia, *Sexual Personae* 13). As we shall see, the Lolita figure of contemporary film incorporates the image of young girlhood into this representational tug-of-war. Lolita, it seems, is the aggressive response to the saccharine sweetness of Disney's movie-girls.

Film has provided the richest material for popular culture to explore and transform the image of the child (femme) fatale with all her beguiling charms, as well as all of her social threat. As the most popular form of narrative for the twentieth century, film registers dominant ideologies, as well as any disruptions or challenges to those ideologies. As Laura Mulvey puts it, in her influential article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the "preoccupations" of a mainstream film "reflect the psychical obsessions of the society which produced it" (23). What this chapter will do is situate Lolita and her kind in the history of film and its preoccupations with girlhood. Early depictions of young girls in the opening decades of the twentieth century are not, as Sinclair would argue, cinematic Lolitas or nymphets. They are, in fact, more akin to Humbert's Annabel Leigh; that is, innocent precursors to be eclipsed by a lethal Lolita. Rather than simply seek Lolita's origins in youngish, or even very young, early-twentieth-century Hollywood stars, I prefer to argue that the contemporary celluloid Lolita is ideologically related to the *femme fatale* of 1940s' American *film noir*.

I begin with an examination of early cinema's presentation of feminine virtue, and a discussion of Shirley Temple, the proto-totsy. Rather than arguing that these childish stars and child stars of film are Lolita's only precursors, as does Sinclair, I demonstrate that these figures acted as reinscriptions of dominant ideology with regard to feminine virtue. And Shirley Temple, precocious though she was, was also ideologically an icon for cultural optimism and faith in the future. It was not until World War II that pessimism crept into the American psyche, and *film noir* reflected this anxiety. Not surprisingly, *film noir* became preoccupied with the *femme fatale* figure as an image of corruption and disillusionment. This, I will argue, is the origin of Lolita as the late twentieth century's cinematic demon nymphet. I will then turn my attention to both adaptations of Nabokov's novel by filmmakers Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne. In doing so, I will demonstrate that both film versions of

Nabokov's novel construct the demon nymphet as socially disruptive by drawing from *film noir* sensibilities and, especially, the image of the *femme fatale*.

II. The Innocents of Early Cinema

> **When in film history did Lolita's siblings first appear? When did children become sex objects? The obvious answer is: in retrospect. (Corliss, *Lolita* 27)**

America, it must be admitted, did not experience the same *fin-de-siècle* malaise and world-weariness at the turn of the nineteenth century as did Europe. The celluloid *femme fatale* was something of a rare bird in the earliest films of American silent cinema.[49] Perhaps America as a nation was still too young, and too optimistic, to contemplate notions of cultural decline and degeneration. Heroic American optimism was reflected in its blossoming popular culture and, especially, in its representations of young girls. Lubin, in *Picturing a Nation*, has demonstrated that although images of girls functioned as part of the surveillance and scrutiny of childhood, these images were, on the whole, still firmly part of a Romantic tradition that depicted a form of feminine virtue embodied by very young girls. Again, the good girl served as an apt metaphor for present, and future, cultural virtue. American cinema, the popular art form *par excellence*, also contributed to the image of wholesome girlhood with all its cultural optimism. Even a cursory glance at early American films from the first two decades of the twentieth century reveals a preoccupation with images of pure, innocent femininity. If early films did express any sense of danger or threat, it was narratively presented as "purity imperilled." Innocence, embodied by a child-like woman, could be threatened, pursued, but always somehow preserved—either rescued by a clean, upright (male) protector, or saved by a self-sacrificing suicidal leap from a precipice. American innocence was never debauched without reprisal, nor were young girls portrayed as themselves a socially corrupting force.

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[49] One notable exception is the notorious silent screen star, Theda Bara, the original and quintessential "vamp" of cinema. Her wicked persona, denounced from pulpits across America, was drawn explicitly from the European *femme fatale*, and her filmography from Fox Film Corporation reads like a dictionary of *femme fatale* iconography: *The Devil's Daughter* (1915); *Carmen* (1915); *The Serpent* (1916); *The Vixen* (1916); *The Tiger Woman* (1917); *Cleopatra* (1917); and *Salome* (1918) among others. For information about Theda Bara and her recent "revival," see her feature page on *The Silents Majority* web site. For the biography of Theda Bara, see Eve Golden's *Vamp: The Rise and Fall of Theda Bara*.

Sinclair claims that silent screen stars of this period, such as Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Mary Pickford, "and many other child women of the silent screen were the pioneer Hollywood Lolitas" (13). I would have to disagree, in part, in that the screen personae of such silent movie actresses were based entirely on the Victorian feminine ideal; that is, melting pools of sweet, benign womanhood. Sinclair herself, when describing these women, confirms this view: "They had huge eyes and long curly hair. Their expression was winsome, wistful, frightened or pouting, but it always reflected the reactions of children unused to the ways of the world" (13). These are no Lolitas peering over stern, dark sunglasses. What characterises these early screen heroines is innocence (sexual and otherwise), and a complete lack of sophistication. They are solidly based on, if not a continuation of, the Victorian model of the angel in the house, that pure, uncorrupted virgin. They do not display the excess of female sexuality and power that would be the hallmark of the cinematic *femme fatale* and the later cinematic Lolita. Furthermore, these charming feminine flowers are utterly dependent on the chivalric instincts of the male figures in the film. What these silent screen heroines provided was a visual image of feminine purity, as well as a narrative guarantee that patriarchal society was stable and secure. If anything, they are the American version of Balzac's character, Pauline, in *The Wild Ass's Skin*, a woman who appears to have been stunted in her fourteenth year, or of the Dickensian model of the plucky but essentially good child, or perhaps even Dora, the adorable "child-wife."[50] They are all "tender dreamy childishness" with absolutely no "eerie vulgarity" (*Lolita* 44).

Take, for example, the roles played by Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which typify two particular aspects of ideal womanhood that patriarchal America loved to emphasise: the imperilled innocent, and the self-sacrificing virgin. *Birth of a Nation*, like many early films, makes use of the female body as a metaphor for political, racial and nationalist ideology. Set during the American Civil War, and the period of the Reconstruction, this epic film sets out to tell the tale of the birth of the United States under President Lincoln. The "birth" of this new "nation" also requires the "birth" of true (white) womanhood in order to culturally preserve the symbolic "virgin" soil of the United States with all its potential. And both Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh possessed the perfect, dewy screen image to portray that ideal.

Gish plays Elsie Stoneman, a Northern idealist, who becomes naively embroiled in the political turmoil of the civil war. Her sweet grace simultaneously inspires perverse lust in a mulatto, as well as the chivalric instincts of her white Southern lover, who rushes to her rescue before her purity can be debauched. Marsh plays the youngest daughter of the Southern Cameron family, dubbed "the little pet," who is mercilessly pursued by an ill-intentioned freed slave to the top of a rocky precipice. When rescue arrives too late, purity takes the plunge off the cliff in self-preservation. The intertitle reads, "For her who had learned the stern lesson of honor we should not grieve that she found sweeter the opal gates of death" (emphasis in the original). Both female characters emphasise the role of women in society at the turn of the century. Gish's character must learn that politics is in every way a man's world, and that becoming even slightly politically involved means certain danger. Luckily, her Southern lover is willing to overlook her Northern political opinions in order to come to her rescue at the last minute. Marsh's character embodies honour preserved at any cost: even "the opal gates of death" are preferable to having one's "opal" purity corrupted.

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[50] D. W. Griffith, for example, was a great admirer of Charles Dickens, as well as Edgar Allen Poe, in terms of narrative and characterisation (Sinclair 13). Sergei Eisenstein would later argue that Griffith's montage was also inspired by Dickens. See Eisenstein's "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today."

Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh depicted a loveliness much in the way sentimental nineteenth-century paintings of women depicted a fragile beauty. With their delicate features, averted eyes, and petite forms, they, like an intertextual déjà vu, seem to be figures from any number of paintings of wilting Elaines, Ladies of Shalot, and Ophelias. The same can be said of Mary Pickford, most notably, who was no Lolita. Rather than upsetting the cart of feminine apples, Mary Pickford's screen image conformed perfectly with the puritanical American ideal. She occupied "a special position in the hearts of all those Americans who shrank from the looming Jazz Age and its baggage of new attitudes and emancipated flappers" (Sinclair 37).

She was "America's sweetheart," and the first major star of Hollywood, precisely because her screen persona, which included "running round trees and pointing at rabbits" (Sinclair 39), coincided with audience expectations. In films such as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1917), and the glad and happy *Pollyanna* (1920), "The Girl with the Curls" seemed to distil and concretise for the audience true womanhood ideals. Through a film career spanning over two decades and at least fifty full-length feature films, not to mention a divorce and an evolving business sense, it is remarkable that at thirty-two years of age she could still appear to be the sweet little girl.

While it does seem dubious (by contemporary standards) that the image of ideal womanhood should so closely resemble a child, or even be a woman parading as a child, the erotic gaze at Mary Pickford, like that at Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh, was not as fraught with the ambiguity and cultural distress as the gaze at a Lolita-type. Film critic Bret Wood, in his article, "Lolita Syndrome," notes that Mary Pickford in her role of "virginal waif" cloaked any adult desirability "in a mawkish display of childish playfulness that encouraged viewers to lose themselves in a romantic fantasy unsullied by adult anxiety" (32). Mary Pickford's image was a soothing pacification of social fears engendered by those dangerously emancipated flappers with their socially disobedient practices such as bobbing their hair, smoking cigarettes, dancing the Charleston, and drinking booze at the local speakeasy during the prohibition. Contrary to Sinclair's claim that Pickford was a nymphet, Nabokov would have insisted that Humbert Humbert liked little girls (*Strong Opinions* 93), not "fluffy and frolicsome" (*Lolita* 25) women who could merely imitate little girls.

III. Shirley Temple: A Sacred Monster of Cinema

> **[S]he was blessed by nature not with beauty but with total emptiness, a fat, round face with nothing in it and a body to match—like Ms. Potato Head. (Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence* 120)**

Some have argued that nymphets in cinema can trace their lineage to the ultimate original totsy, Shirley Temple, of the 1930s. Temple, trained by her mother since birth to be a movie star, was, as Sinclair states, "an infant prodigy, so precocious that her youthful talent made her a sort of Mozart of the movie-moppet brigade" (47). With her head of perfectly styled fifty-six curls, Shirley Temple was "America's little sweetheart" who tap-danced, sang and dimpled her way into American consciousness. But to call Shirley Temple a nymphet is a bit of a stretch. Her screen persona was too plucky, too perfect, and too optimistic to provoke a sense of ambiguity. It is instructive to rethink Shirley Temple not in terms of her supposed erotic appeal but, rather, to analyse her screen persona and films in terms of representations of girls that conform to the socially acceptable versus those that are socially disruptive. In fact, Temple was ideologically coded in an acceptable way, which then served to ease American anxieties generated by the Great Depression. Temple played the wholesome, chubby, asexual little girl who was able to provide the movie-going audience with "precious dreams to cling to, especially during the Depression" (Sinclair 51). So precious were these dreams in dreary times that President Franklin D. Roosevelt called her "the antidote to the Depression" (qtd. in duCille 12).

Many critics, including Bret Wood and Ann duCille, when arguing that she was a proto-nymphet, or a "make-a-blind-man-see femme fatale" (16), to use duCille's words, turn their attention to her earliest film roles. Temple entered film at four years of age in a series of short one-reelers produced by Jack Hays and Charles Lamont. The "Baby Burlesks," as they were called, were parodies and spoofs of popular film genres, and acted out by very small children. Her roles in these short films include a curious mixture of innocents, along with vamps, *femmes fatales*, and prostitutes: in *Polly Tix in Washington* (1933), she is a professional seductress assigned to corrupt a politician; in *War Babies* (1933), she plays a sexy French barmaid over whom two soldiers battle; and in *Kid 'n' Hollywood* (1933), she plays a scrubwoman who is transformed into a Hollywood *femme fatale* named the "incomparable Morelegs Sweet Trick," a role explicitly modelled after Marlene Dietrich, the then reigning "queen of sex, sin, and song" (duCille 15).

While critics often point to her early "Burlesk" roles as an example of the prurient erotic gaze at little girls, as well as Temple's peculiar appeal as a nymphet, I would be more inclined to argue that her "Baby Burlesk" roles as barmaids, hookers, and Dietrich tell us very little about Temple's erotic allure. Rather, it can be argued that casting a child as a diminutive Dietrich, or a miniature Mae West, was a means to deflate even further the power of throaty *femmes fatales*, sultry French *filles*, and expensive call girls.[51] The childishly misspelled word "burlesk," here, means parodies, spoofs and debasements, not the "bump-and-grind striptease the word connotes today" (Wood 33). As Gérard Genette argues, in *Palimpsests*, a "burlesque" is a way to familiarise, trivialise and tame a text (56-73). This is precisely what the "Baby Burlesk" one-reelers were accomplishing; that is, a comedic debasing, though often in very bad taste, and peppered with a liberal amount of bawdy jokes. Not only were popular cinematic genres travestied, but adult feminine seductiveness and independence were trivialised. Whether in black lace, gaudy jewels, or high-heeled shoes, the effect is simply to make the four-year-old Shirley Temple seem more cute, the clothes emphasising her obvious baby-body, while deflating the feminine mystique necessary for the seasoned seductress's preying mantis power. In this configuration, a *femme fatale* is simply a child in black lace and feathers, and no more threatening to patriarchy than the toddler herself. In later films, Shirley Temple's adorable persona would be fully cultivated to act as the cinematic counterpoint to the liberated, fast-talking woman; specifically, the voluptuous, and delightfully racy, Mae West.[52]

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[51] I must mention a curious reference, a two-second shot in fact, to Shirley Temple in the 1997 film, *L.A. Confidential*. For a brief moment, we catch a glimpse of a Shirley Temple-type (complete with blonde curls and a pretty, white dress with a pink sash) perched on a man's knee (a typical occurrence in Temple films) at a "Fleur de Lys" party where high-priced celebrity-look-alike prostitutes "entice" their clientele. This brief "child-prostitution" motif—especially when that motif involves a Temple-type—adds to the film's relentless atmosphere of 1950s' Hollywood decadence.

[52] Wood notes that Temple offered "a distinct backlash against the pre-Code gold-diggers played by Mae West and Jean Harlow, staunchly independent women who had little use for men beyond the payment of the rent. Such women were too intimidating to the conservative, upper-middle-class male [...]" (34). It was also the censors's reactions to Mae West's salacious wit that ushered in a more strict enforcement of the Production Code in 1934 (Giannetti 184).

If her early film roles are not sufficient fodder for positing a sexed-up Shirley Temple, critics also turn to British novelist Graham Greene's notorious review of the film *Captain January* (1936), for *The Spectator*, and the more infamous "Sex and Shirley Temple" review of *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), for the weekly magazine *Night and Day*, as proof that Temple's appeal was of a sexual nature, and pandered to a room full of panting nympholepts.[53] A closer scrutiny of Greene's reviews, however, reveal that his comments are oozing irony and a tongue-in-cheek British wit which is achieved by the paradoxical juxtaposing of incongruous elements à la John Donne (and the basis of later "Monty Python" comedy). I would also argue that his reviews functioned as a blasé verbal backlash against the Motion Picture Production Code's militant desire to erase any whiff of sex, sensuality, and sin from Hollywood cinema. No doubt, Greene was annoyed by the exploitation of childhood and found it rather absurd that a tiny tot like Shirley Temple should so completely stand as a sentimental emblem of supposed (and hypocritical) American wholesomeness and Production Code purity. If the Motion Picture Production Code (adopted in 1930 and more strictly enforced in 1934) had blown out any whiff of adult sex, Greene was going to blow it right back in.

For example, in his review of *Captain January*, Greene suggested that Temple's appeal seemed "to rest on a coquetry quite as mature as Miss [Claudette] Colbert's and on an oddly precocious body as voluptuous in grey flannel trousers as Miss [Marlene] Dietrich's" (qtd. in duCille 14-15). By paralleling Temple's performance with that of two very desirable screen goddesses (perhaps he was thinking of Colbert as Cleopatra 1934, and Dietrich as Domini Enfilden in *The Garden of Allah* in 1936), Greene's comments subvert the intention of Temple's clean-as-a-whistle screen persona. Later, in his review of *Wee Willie Winkie*,[54] Greene continued to develop his wry commentary by noting that Temple was interesting in a "peculiar" way:

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[53] It is notable to mention that it was Greene's glowing review of Nabokov's *Lolita* in 1956 that raised a furore in Britain, and sparked the ensuing bans on the novel. In recent accounts, Greene has been cast as a paedophile himself for his ability to comment in a humorous way on paedophilic longing (Walkerdine 141).

> Infancy with her is a disguise, her appeal is more secret and more adult. Already two years ago she was a fancy little piece [...]. In *Captain January*, she wore trousers with the mature suggestiveness of a Dietrich: her neat and well-developed rump twisted in the tap-dance: her eyes had a sidelong searching coquetry. Now in *Wee Willie Winkie*, wearing short kilts she is a complete totsy [...]. (qtd. in Wood)

In his most Humbert-ly heated moment, Greene asked his readers to "watch the way she measures a man with agile studio eyes, with dimpled depravity" (qtd. in Walkerdine 141). Greene went on to say that Temple's audience of middle-aged men and clergymen (the group most vulnerable to the pernicious effects of film) responded to her "dubious coquetry, to the sight of her well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous vitality, only because the safety curtain of story and dialogue drops between their intelligence and their desire" (qtd. in Walkerdine 141).

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[54] Because of the libel suit against *Night and Day* for having published such a "gross outrage" (Wood 32), the review of *Wee Willie Winkie*, in the October 28, 1937 issue, is no longer readily available. For this reason, I have had to piece together his comments, as others have had to do before me, from bits and fragments quoted in other sources.

Unfortunately for Greene, literal-minded Americans then, as now, found his humour not in the least bit funny. His comments had gone too far, and the magazine *Night and Day* was slapped with a libel suit by Twentieth Century-Fox.[55] For Kincaid, Greene's comments simply "specify the fantasy" that feeds the "erotic longing" for childhood (*Erotic Innocence* 114), a longing that lurks behind what Greene called "the safety curtain of story and dialogue." Walkerdine, too, notes that Greene's reviews reveal that part of the function "of love and charm that [Shirley Temple] served included a strongly erotically coded element" (141), and more broadly speaking, "the investment in little girls as objects of a suppressed but none the less ubiquitous erotic gaze" (142).

Perhaps Salvador Dali had Greene's film reviews, and the libel suit, in mind when he painted a work, titled *Shirley Temple, the Youngest Sacred Monster of Contemporary Cinema*, in 1939 (fig. 5:2). Temple is figured as a bestial sphinx who languishes over the bones of her hapless victims, wearing nothing but a look of measured ambivalence. In proper surrealist fashion, Dali's painting, like Greene's wry comments, transforms the iconic image of Temple into an unexpected and disturbing fantasy. This shocking metamorphosis only casts into relief the absurd incongruity between Temple's screen persona and the adult *femme fatale*'s sphinx-like threat, except the "curse" that follows when her sacred image is besmirched by British wit. But what, precisely, was so sacred about this young "monster's" image? What were those suppressed erotic longings suppose to provoke?

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[55] In the end, the court found in favour of the studio and awarded the outrageous sum of £2,000 to Shirley Temple, £1,000 to her film corporation, and £500 to her film company (Sinclair 57), and the review could never be reproduced.

Page 180 has been removed due to copyright restriction. The information removed was Figure 5:2, Salvador Dali's painting, *Shirley Temple, the Youngest Sacred Monster of Contemporary Cinema* (1939), Boymans-van-Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam; rpt. as a postcard for *Benedikt Taschen Cologne PostcardBook*.

Critic Ann duCille, in her article, "The Shirley Temple of My Familiar," argues that Temple furthered "a patriarchal ideology" that "equates whiteness with beauty and makes true white womanhood a prized domestic ideal" (13-14). Certainly, Temple is no different in this respect from Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh in *Birth of a Nation*, or Mary Pickford as Pollyanna. Central to Shirley Temple's various screen roles is her ability to be a cute, cheerful sunbeam, and to nurture and repair broken family relationships—all of which sounds much like Gorham's description of the desirable innocence embodied by the ideal Victorian girl, one that reinforced the domestic ideology of the late-nineteenth-century middle-class (*The Victorian Girl* 58).

Along with this reinforcement of the domestic feminine ideal, Temple's films also sugar-coated larger social and economic issues of the "Dirty Thirties," including poverty and crime. Walkerdine proposes that Shirley Temple's film roles and persona were a way of presenting the Depression Era working class, the unemployed, and the dispossessed in a way acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie; that is, Shirley Temple personified a feminised, vulnerable, loveable working class worthy of charity. By feminising the working class, and making it an adorable, blonde, dimpled darling, fears about working class anger and violence were temporarily allayed. She summarises Temple's ideological premise thus: "The dirty and poor are not nasty and frightening but just loveable little girl children and not angry, fighting adult men" (93). Temple "takes on the role of the poor girl whose main function is to charm the rich, persuade them through their love for her to love the poor and the unemployed [...]" (93). Such ideology is at work in *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1936), and in *The Little*

Princess (1939). In the latter film, Temple plays a once rich little girl who is plunged into dire impecuniousness and must work as kitchen help, and sleep in a cold attic, at a privileged British girls' school. Her pathetic plight inspires the charity of a wealthy neighbour and the benevolence of those around her, including the (now) amused Queen Victoria.

Her role also included the pacification of fears about the blossoming criminal element in American society. Take, for example, the 1934 film, *Little Miss Marker*, in which Temple plays a little girl left with a bookie, Sorrowful Jones (Adolphe Menjou), as a $20 marker for a bet on a horse. Her widowed and problem-gambler father kills himself as he lacks the $20 necessary to reclaim his daughter. Temple is left in a seedy world full of drunks, gold-digging night-club singers, gangsters and gamblers; a world of "frame-ups," "rackets" and race-horses. "Markie," as Temple's character is dubbed, is so sweet, so charming, and so innocent that she wins over every criminal heart. For Sorrowful Jones and Bangles Carson, "going sappy on the kid" means that they sense the inadequacy of their lives, worry that they will be a bad influence on the little girl, and that she will lose her childhood innocence (which, in this case, means a belief in fairies and Arthurian knights). Needless to say, all the gangsters, including even the most hardened heart, named Big Steve, experience the pangs of "sappiness" required for solid child-rearing. All it takes to transform a callous gangster into a better citizen is a head of blonde ringlets and dimples on a five-year-old's cheeks. In *Now and Forever* (1934), a similar narrative occurs within a "family values" ideology. Temple plays Penelope (Penny) Day, whose father (Gary Cooper) is a cynical con-man, and is called a "blackguard and a cad" by his in-laws.

Rather than take a $72,000 cash pay-out from his in-laws for the child, Jerry Day, enchanted by his daughter's dreamy childishness, decides to try his hand at parenting. Temple's character, which is no different from that in *Little Miss Marker*, inspires in a con-man and his new wife, who both claim to "hate life," longings for family unity, domestic stability, and "honour bright."

The codes of "erotic innocence," as Kincaid calls it, certainly play a role in deciphering Temple's appeal. By erotic innocence, Kincaid means a hollowed-out Romantic image into which society can project whatever it wishes, including voyeuristic pleasure and eroticism. And yet this gaze at "erotic innocence" is not the same as the gaze at the "erotic depravity" of a *femme fatale* or a Lolita, no matter what Mulvey may suggest about the gaze at the female body in film. The visual pleasure derived from gazing at the spectacle of Shirley Temple is not all that salacious. Her image is not framed or fragmented like Marlene Dietrich's legs or Greta Garbo's face. Gazing at an erotically coded innocent is a way to pacify anxiety and a way to experience a calming, nostalgic, reassurance (questionable though that soothing strategy may be). The gaze at a *femme fatale*, however, is fraught with the fear of woman, of her sexual prowess, and her power to disrupt cherished social norms and standards. For this reason, Shirley Temple, even in her "Baby Burlesk" roles, remains the vacuous child of nostalgic longing, of cute dress-up comedy, and the icon of optimism and ideal purity.

IV. The Adaptable Nymphet

> **By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism. (Kincaid, *Child-Loving* 4-5)**

When Nabokov was experiencing his initial "little throb" of inspiration for *Lolita* in late 1939 or early 1940, according to his afterword, then later penning his *Lolita* around 1949 (*Lolita* 311-312), Hollywood was still in the process of reinforcing the image of the Shirley Temple-like good girl with a crop of starlets such as Deanna Durbin, Judy Garland and Elizabeth Taylor. Sinclair terms these starlets "safe Lolitas" who "were neither sexy nor provocative, nor naughty [...]" (61). They had "sweet faces and sweet voices" and "did not pose a threat to the sacred institution of marriage and the family [...]" (64). However, Lolita, the modern child (femme) fatale, can never function as a "safe" image and, thus, it must be argued, the likes of Garland, Durbin and Taylor were no Lolitas at all. Rather, they functioned as an extension of "safe" femininity—from Lillian Gish to Shirley Temple—so favoured by early cinema.

Conversely, the Lolita of the novel is not a Shirley Temple, nor is she a Judy Garland or an Elizabeth Taylor. Nymphets, as Nabokov pointed out, are "not starlets" (*Strong Opinions* 93). Yet, the many references to Hollywood cinema in Nabokov's novel brings the image of the perfect girl-child, cultivated by numerous popular American films, into a new circuit of meaning. Nabokov's blasphemy, then, includes a blasphemy performed on the Hollywood version of ideal girlhood from the sixteen-year-old Judy Garland, in her "crisp, clean pinafore and her neat braids"

(Sinclair 61), in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), to the twelve-year-old Elizabeth Taylor, with her vacuous, violet eyes, in *National Velvet* (1944). Nabokov may have had these ideal girls in mind when he penned his carnivalesque version of a not-so-cute, disobedient, smart-mouthed brat with greasy (rather than ringleted) hair and bruised legs. Out of Lolita's mouth comes a "volley of crude nonsense" (*Lolita* 42) rather than "The Good Ship Lollipop" or "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." The Lolita-type embodies a cynical and pessimistic vocabulary, for, as Sinclair points out, "World War II had revealed too much for people to go on believing in good little fairies like Shirley Temple or Deanna Durbin who could get grown-ups out of the mess they'd got themselves into" (93). This new girl-child, dressed in Humbert's lexicon of desire and doom, is the *film noir femme fatale* revisited.

In *film noir*, the centrality of the "dark lady" reflects the uncertainty and pessimism of society during, and immediately after, World War II.[56] Film critic Janey Place, in her essay, "Women in Film Noir," notes that the *femme fatale* embodies the "fear of loss of stability, identity, and security" which are attitudes "reflective of the dominant feelings of the time" (37). Sylvia Harvey, as well, in her essay, "Woman's Place," notes that the American sense of national unity, generated during the war, began to fall apart and a "process of general disillusionment" began "for many of those returning home after the war, in search of those values which they had fought to defend" (25-26). Not only was there inflation and rising unemployment, but women had the audacity to enter the workforce in record numbers, and then stay there. America was experiencing its first pangs of real social unease, and the *femme fatale* (dangerous, desirable, independent, and far from domestic), embodied several challenges to patriarchal ideology.

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[56] The *film noir* period is typically demarcated by John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) (Harvey 33). I also make reference to the earlier films of Joseph von Sternberg in which Marlene Dietrich portrays several *femmes fatales*.

Likewise, the Lolita figure in film is a site for a nexus of social anxieties and threats to patriarchy. As Hollander, in his 1956 review of Nabokov's *Lolita*, intoned, the almost-teenage-girl "is the only plausible modern *femme fatale*" (83). Her plausibility rests not only on the invocation of a taboo sexuality, but what that sexuality represents. Like the *femme fatale*, Lolita is a version of the unacceptable female archetype on several levels: Lolita's desirable, but utterly taboo, sexuality exists right in the midst of what should be the security of the middle-class home; secondly, Lolita evokes the dread of woman and the threat of castration that her untamed sexuality represents. E. Ann Kaplan explains, in her introductory essay to *Women in Film Noir*, that "one way to evoke the threat of female sexuality is to exclude from the films that situation of the family in which it would otherwise be contained" (3). The acceptable location for the expression of female sexuality in Western culture is within the confines of marriage, the home, and the family. Significantly, however, the cinematic Lolita seems to have been brewed in a hothouse of domestic discontent. They are consistently displaced from "normal" family relations in one way or another: they can be orphans; the product of single-parent homes; raised in brothels; or raised in middle-class families where both parents are notably absent due to their self-absorption and/or career pursuits.

As with *film noir*'s *femme fatale*, Lolita embodies a "violent assault on the conventional values of family life" (Harvey 31). Unlike little Shirley Temple or young Elizabeth Taylor, the perfectly charming embodiments of domestic stability and optimism, Lolita-types are not dutiful daughters who nurture family relationships, nor do they inspire the very best (chivalric) attitudes in the male protagonists. These "sexy Lolitas," as Sinclair points out, are "notoriously lethal" to both "the sacred institution of marriage and the family" (64). Lolita embodies so many overlapping and interrelated anxieties—the breakdown of the nuclear family, decaying middle-class values, female sexuality unbound, and taboo eroticism—that a romantic entanglement with a Lolita-type, far outside the boundaries of domestic acceptability and moral law, typically leads to the male protagonist's destruction (Harvey 29). Lolita-types appear to be the very worst products of decaying "family values."

Not unlike Humbert's "projection room" of "pain and despair" (*Lolita* 231), film acts as an occasion to express the turbulence that poses a threat to dominant ideology and, in a related fashion, to the sacred image of girlhood. In what follows, I examine Stanley Kubrick's and Adrian Lyne's cinematic versions of Nabokov's novel not from the point of view of formalist theories of adaptation, which tend to be very reductive and not terribly fruitful.[57] Rather, I prefer to examine these films in terms of their historical and cinematic context, and the image of girlhood with reference to that context. What is adapted to screen is not only Nabokov's novel—its plot, characters, dialogue and so forth—but a web of social concerns that circulate around the figure of the girl-child at each particular moment in time.[58] As I argue, what presents itself as most "adaptable" is not the novel but the nymphet herself. In other words, Lolita is a concept of girlhood that is constantly transformed (but never reformed) to suit particular social needs, as well as to serve as the seductive vamp, the alluring *femme fatale*, who disrupts conventional values.

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[57] Such is the case with Greg Jenkins's book, *Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation*, as well as Dan E. Burns's article, "Pistols and Cherry Pies: *Lolita* From Page to Screen." These approaches, though thorough, assume, perhaps erroneously, that filmmakers valiantly struggle to faithfully adapt, or find visual correlatives for, the work of literature and its language, without consideration for any extra-textual inspiration or social discourses.

All latter-day Lolitas reverse the innocent "Pickford formula" by donning "grown-up drag" and boasting "a sophistication and sexual experience beyond their years" (Wood 32). What I will do is examine what, precisely, these disruptions to formulaic expectations signify. I argue that just as fragile, delicate womanhood of early cinema was transformed into the adult 1940s *femme fatale* in order to reflect transformations in society, so too is the image of innocent girlhood transformed into the figure of the child (femme) fatale. As we shall see, Kubrick's inaugural cinematic version of Lolita relies on stock *femme fatale* visuals to create a comedic teenage temptress. Lyne's tragic nymphet, the innocent vixen, emphasises the moral and cultural perplexity that marks the turn of the twentieth century.

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[58] My approach to these adaptations is, in part, akin to the polysystem theory suggested by Patrick Cattrysse in his article, "Film (Adaptation) as Translation," in which he states: "Even film adaptations of famous literary texts generally do not limit themselves to adapting the literary source alone. The story of such a book may have guided the film adaptation on the narratological level, but other aspects such as directing, staging, acting, setting, costume, lighting, photography, pictorial representation, music, etc. may well have been governed by other models and conventions which did not originate in the literary text and did not serve as a translation of any of its elements" (61-62). For Cattrysse, this means that the purpose of analysis includes trying to "find and explain the relations between discursive practices with regard to their respective (socio-cultural, political, economical, etc.) contexts […]" (62).

V. Stanley Kubrick's "Loleeta Sweeta"

> **Have the reviewers looked at the schoolgirls of America lately? The classmates of my fourteen-year-old daughter are not merely nubile: some of them look badly used. (Kael 208)**
>
> **I feel sorry for her. She's neurotic and pathetic and she is only interested in herself. (Sue Lyon, qtd. in Corliss, *Lolita* 30)**

I began this chapter with a description of the promotional poster for Kubrick's 1962 adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita*. I wish to return to that image, for a moment, in order to discuss the iconography employed in popular culture's image of Lolita (fig. 5:1). The 1962 movie-Lolita established a set of easily recognisable codes that became the visual clichés of subsequent cinematic Lolitas. In particular, there are two striking aspects of the promotional poster image that point to Lolita as a child (femme) fatale. Firstly, Lolita's heart-shaped sunglasses are not simply protective eyewear for a *jeune fille*. Lolita's sunglasses are, in fact, the girl's symbolic appropriation of the gaze, a gaze which is traditionally male and is central to the cinematic apparatus. The cinematic gaze at Lolita, this image informs us, will not be as benign and comforting as Mary Pickford's and Shirley Temple's spectacles of "erotic innocence." This will be a cinematic gaze fraught with the ambiguity and tension generated by a woman who returns the gaze.

To this first provocation we can also add the emphasis on Lolita's mouth, with that cherry lollipop wrapped in her moist, lipstick-red lips. This is an intertextual reference not only to Humbert's description of Lolita's lips "as red as licked red candy" (*Lolita* 44), but to the cinematic vamp's sexually hungering mouth. The erotic pleasure of sucking on a lollipop becomes, in a post-war American consumer culture, symbolic of the erotic pleasure of economic consumption. Stratton notes in his book, *The Desirable Body*, that the "eroticisation of consumption" is articulated by the female mouth "emphasised by bright-red lipstick" (147). The combined emphases on Lolita's enigmatic sunglasses and her cherry-red mouth call to mind Theda Bara's kohl-rimmed eyes and darkened lips in *A Fool There Was* (1915), a film in which this quintessential vamp drains a married man of his money and his "vital essence," as sexologists of the nineteenth century would have quaintly put it. It also calls to mind later *femmes fatales* of *film noir*—with their sunglasses, their oft-applied dark red lipstick, and their sultry drags on cigarettes—who have a proclivity for draining and diminishing men. Like these vamps and *femmes fatales*, Lolita will be a gazing, desiring and "consuming" female body, and not a "consumed" victim. Indeed, this unholy visage of girlhood is nothing less than an icon of childhood heresy.

While it is true that any film's promotional poster tends to hyperbolise imagery for the purpose of enticing potential audiences, Kubrick's film does, as we shall see, follow through on this cluster of motifs. No doubt, Kubrick was inspired by the scandals and reviews that surrounded the novel's publication and wished to produce something equally scandalous, and related to the contemporary social milieu (for scandal can only flourish where it is relevant). Though Kubrick and Harris persuaded Nabokov to write the screenplay, Nabokov's unwieldy and unfilmable script was almost completely discarded.[59] This may be because, as Stratton explains, Kubrick wanted the film to work within the popular reading of Lolita as a "sexualised American teenager" (53), and her relationship with Humbert as one "mediated by money and commodities" (52). Nor was Kubrick's adaptation of Lolita's character inspired by the novel's description of her which is fleeting, abstract and fragmentary to begin with. Part of Kubrick's strategy was to opt for an all-American blonde girl, the visual ideal, then to deconstruct that image by giving her the attributes of a *femme fatale*.

Kubrick admitted, in a 1963 interview with Elaine Dundy, that his version of Nabokov's *Lolita* "was a comment on the social scene" (14). His commentary, as Thomas Allen Nelson notes in his study, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze*, involves a close scrutiny of "the disparities between the forms of social normality and the truths of an unarticulated but real psychological disorder" (63). One disparity, signalled by the film's promotional poster, exists between this new visage of girlhood and the virtuous virgin of old. It is obvious that this Lolita is not about to plunge from a precipice in order to preserve her "honour," nor will she inspire the requisite "sappiness" for harmonious domestic relations. Her actions will not soothe anxieties and sugar-coat larger social problems but, rather, will appear to embody them. From the opening credits, in which Lolita's little foot is cradled in Humbert's masculine hands as he submissively paints her toenails, to the last shot of Lolita, pregnant, in a dismal shanty town and wearing horn-rimmed glasses, this Lolita is the midtwentieth-century wayward girl in all her culturally distressing finery. She is all "eerie vulgarity" without the "tender dreamy childishness" (*Lolita* 44).

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[59] For information on Nabokov's screenplay and the circumstances surrounding the filming, see Nabokov's foreword to *Lolita: A Screenplay* (pp. vii-xiii*)*, as well as Appel's comparison of the screenplay and the film in *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (pp. 228-236).

A milieu of moral ambiguity is where the cinematic *femme fatale* thrives, and moral ambiguity abounds in this film. As Devin McKinney puts it, in his review of Lyne's *Lolita*, the atmosphere in Kubrick's film is one of "suburban murk, as unwholesomely wholesome as a moldering loaf of Wonderbread [...]" (48). Rather than setting the film in the late 1940s (the time period of the novel), Kubrick opts for a contemporary America of the late 1950s. And rather than the moody, psychologically expressive low-key lighting of *film noir*, the lighting in *Lolita* is almost consistently high-key as befits a comedy of "black slapstick" (Kael 205). It is in these well-illuminated settings, however, that one can perceive the "murky moral confusion" that is typical of *film noir* (Place 41). The various cluttered and claustrophobic bric-a-brac-filled rooms are the perfect settings for a "psychological film style" (Nelson 60). In the opening scene, for example, Quilty's Pavor Manor, approached through a haze of fog, is filled with images of disorderly cultural excess: antique furniture, statues, a Ping-Pong table, a harp, unpacked crates, empty liquor bottles and overflowing ashtrays. The Haze home, as well, through which Humbert must wend his way during his initial tour, is filled with an assortment of domestic clutter: trashy Mexican knick-knacks, soiled socks, framed reproductions, as well as an abundance of stripe-patterned wallpaper that resembles the bars of a domestic prison.

To add to this sense of claustrophobia, much of the action of the film takes place in bedrooms and bathrooms. Nelson explains that these rooms are "the most private chambers of domesticity, where reside the most guilty and repressed secrets of suburbia […]" (73). What is illuminated in these bedrooms and bathrooms is an America of rapacious appetites and sexually active teenage girls. In the "intellectually progressive" (*Lolita*) New Hampshire suburbs, where a relentless undercurrent of adultery, partner-swapping, secret liaisons, and "extremely broad-minded" (*Lolita*) attitudes flourish like a lot of "post-Kinsey American kink" (McKinney 48), Lolita emerges as a central image for the instability of domestic patriarchal ideals. This environment of cultural excess translates into female sexual excess. Lolita, like the *femme fatale* of *film noir*, represents a form of female sexuality that exists outside the acceptable but banal domestic sphere of stripe-patterned wallpaper. As a figure of power, Lolita dominates and controls not only the narrative but male desire as well. Corliss succinctly notes that Kubrick's film emphasises "all Lolita's gestations: temptress, dominatrix and brat" (*Lolita* 31).

Before meeting Lolita herself, Humbert (James Mason), the potential lodger, is conducted through the Haze home by Charlotte Haze (Shelley Winters). In the novel, Charlotte is described as "a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich" (*Lolita* 37), yet rather than attractive, as even a diluted Dietrich would be, this Charlotte is desperately predatory and wholly undesirable. She is not just a "burlesque of a suburban matron" (Corliss, *Lolita* 42), but a comically debased version of former sex queens of Hollywood. Rather than uttering clever Mae West come-ons, Charlotte's wit is a tacky version of West's verbal foreplay: she tells Humbert, "If it's peace and quiet you're looking for, I assure you, you couldn't get more 'peace' anywhere." Her leopard-spotted wardrobe, too, suggests a suburban version of Dietrich's "Hot

Voodoo" tropical eroticism in *Blonde Venus* (1932). Charlotte, as a pure burlesque of adult femininity, is so terribly irritating that any shot of a more desirable object of erotic contemplation will easily fill a very large visual and narrative space.

Humbert is directed from Charlotte's cluttered domestic interior to the lush garden outside where Lolita (Sue Lyon) poses as a *fleur du mal* of the backyard (fig. 5:3). Rather than the greasy-haired, gangly pubescent girl of the novel, we are presented with a teen-Venus wearing a bikini, a large sunhat, and a pair of dark sunglasses. She appears the very image of female sexuality that flaunts itself as a masquerade, a "hyperbolization of the accoutrements of femininity," (Doane 235) which is a "look" one associates with a *femme fatale* like Barbara Stanwyck playing Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity* (1940). Mary Ann Doane explains in her article, "Film and the Masquerade," that such an excessive production of the feminine acts as a "resistance to patriarchal positioning" through a "denial of the production of femininity as closeness" (235). In other words, this Lolita is visually coded in such a way as to appear remote, inaccessible, unknowable and thus dangerous to patriarchy's highly structured gaze. Her visual and sexual excess reverses the iconography of femininity so typical of the "innocents" and child stars of early cinema. This type of young female appears to be evil incarnate by patriarchy's standards of what constitutes fragile, approachable and blonde girlhood.

Lolita is not a soothing, unsullied Romantic image of girlhood in which audiences can lose themselves. In fact, Lolita, in this cinematic moment, is constructed as the archetypal temptress. Beauvoir would say, in *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*, that she is "a new Eve" created "by merging the 'green fruit'

Page 195 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 5:3, a detail from a film still from Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (MGM, 1962); rpt. in Richard Corliss, *Lolita* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994) 75.

and '*femme fatale*' types" (10). Unlike the delicate and demure womanhood so lovingly depicted by those nineteenth-century paintings of Elaines and Ophelias, Lolita's body is posed and framed in such a way that it invokes late nineteenth-century paintings of seductresses. This backyard odalisque distils the essence of the *femme fatale*, as statuesque and defiant as Manet's enigmatic *Olympia* (fig. 3:7), or as erotically dangerous as Toudouze's *Salome Triumphant* (fig. 3:2). Viewed in her entirety, as Barthes would say about Greta Garbo's face, Lolita is meant to give "rise to mystical feelings of perdition" (*Mythologies* 56).

Though Dorothy Parker once intoned that men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses, girls in sunglasses are another matter. Unlike the undesirable eyewear donned for correcting faulty vision, sunglasses, with their impenetrable lenses, signify a form of feminine mystery because the eyes behind those sunglasses possess an unseen, indeed voyeuristic, gaze. Lolita, with her impenetrable feminine masquerade and her impenetrable sunglasses, constitutes "a type of representation which carries a threat, disarticulating male systems of viewing" (Doane 235). The disarticulation of the male gaze is further emphasised as the camera cuts between Humbert and Lolita. Lolita's gaze is not averted, nor does her expression reflect "the reactions of children unused to the ways of the world" (Sinclair 13). Corliss, who waggishly describes her charms, eloquently describes a child (femme) fatale:

> Lyon in that garden was not a "potential" anything; she was already there. Her unforced insolence announced that she could take care of herself. She had the poise of a girl aware of her body and its

> beguilements. She might be handled, but not moulded. There is nothing a nympholept could teach her. She is already taut. (*Lolita* 73).

Though no dialogue passes between Humbert and Lolita, a palpable tension exists as the two battle for mastery of the gaze. Humbert loses, as his melting, quivering facial features tell us, and he, apparently flustered, looks away. Lolita, however, triumphs and by doing so "poses a threat to an entire system of representation" (Doane 236), not the least of which are the representational strategies used to depict perfect girls with their far-away eyes.

During this ocular battle between teen-queen and bumbling professor, Lolita languidly removes her sunglasses to amusedly watch Humbert with an unblinking, lengthy appraisal. The removal of a woman's glasses—even a pair of sunglasses—transforms her into a spectacle, "the very picture of desire" (236), and in this case, one who bears a smirk of satisfaction as she watches her mother's ineffectual flirtations. Lolita embodies the *femme fatale*'s feminine mystique at its finest, a combination of "to-be-looked-at-ness" and the power to look. This Lolita is, thus, both sexy spectacle and powerful spectator, an ambiguous female figure that hovers between the female as desirable object (in this case, a "cherry pie") and the female as desiring subject. After this backyard display of powerful feminine excess, all of Lolita's subsequent behaviour, and the rest of the film, will be read by the terms established in these shots. As though under the spell of Dietrich's excess of showy, sexy femininity in *Der blaue Engel* (1930), Humbert becomes Lolita's "slave: the pathetic Professor Unrath to an infant Lola Lola" (Corliss, *Lolita* 62).

Lolita, like any good cinematic *femme fatale*, is central to the narrative and the visual space, and exerts a disorienting influence on the action even when absent (Place 45). Mario Falsetto, in his book, *Stanley Kubrick*, remarks,

> On the evidence of Lolita's behavior in many scenes, most viewers would rightly view her as a vulgar, spoiled and sexually experienced teenager who manipulates Humbert throughout the film. Certainly audiences in the early 1960s were not used to seeing teenage girls in such manipulating, controlling positions. (20)

It is not simply Lolita's "behaviour" that suggests her manipulative power over Humbert, it is her visual centrality. She is framed in every shot in such a way that she is the focal point, or presented in a manner that draws the eye in her direction (Place 45). For example, in the sunny backyard, she twirls her hoola-hoop around her hips in the foreground while Humbert watches over his newspaper in the background. In another scene, she kisses Humbert goodnight while he plays chess with Charlotte, and the shot is in perfect triangular classical composition with Lolita at the top of the triangle. Even when she is away at summer camp (nicely named "Camp Climax"), her photograph smiles at Humbert from the marital bedside table, and provokes Humbert's "train of thought" as it hurtles toward possible murder. This scenario nicely calls to mind Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Window* (1944), in which a bored, hen-pecked professor fantasises about a woman in a portrait and a murder intrigue.

Lolita is in perpetual control of Humbert's desire and determines his advances and his retreats like a playful dominatrix. After Charlotte's convenient death, Humbert makes his way to Camp Climax to retrieve his ward. In the car, Lolita hints that because he has not kissed her yet, he must not love her anymore. The cut to a shot of Humbert's car as it hurtles down the highway implies that Lolita is a "fast" little item. That night, at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, Lolita lies prone on the bed, with her legs in the foreground, and suggestively pushes off her high-heeled shoes, one foot at a time. She amusedly listens to Humbert's banter, then yawning and rolling away in boredom, suggests that he "go see about that cot." The next morning, shadows from venetian blinds cast their *noir* expressiveness across the hotel room. Humbert is trapped, seduced, and initiated into Lolita's version of "the game" while she looms over him like an "angel-whore" (Corliss, *Lolita* 73).

The next day, when the two "lovers" take to the road, Lolita appears to be as comfortable navigating junk food as she is at navigating male desire: she easily wraps her tongue around potato chips, and sips soda pop through a straw. Lolita as the embodiment of devouring female desire is further reinforced six months later in the college town of Beardsley. She reclines on a bed, in the same way she did in her mother's backyard, sipping soda through a straw, while Humbert painstakingly paints her toenails. As he quizzes her about her whereabouts when she should have been at piano lessons, Humbert resembles the submissive Edward G. Robinson who kneels before the powerful Joan Bennet and paints her toenails in *Scarlet Street* (1945). When he tells her she is not allowed to associate with "nasty-minded boys," she, the fast-talking dame, quips, "You're a fine one to talk about someone else's mind." Humbert proclaims, in his exasperation before this ambivalent, consuming female, "We have fun together, don't we? Whenever you want something, I buy it for you automatically!" Their relationship is not simply "mediated by money and commodities" (Stratton 52), but it is implied that Lolita determines the terms of this economic exchange. Desiring and desirable, bratty and bored, she is "a wonderful portrait of the banality of lust" (Corliss, *Lolita* 29).

The scene where Lolita plays the ultimate role of a controlling, jaded virago follows upon her performance in the school play (appropriately, penned by Quilty). She, perched on the sofa in her costume, sports exaggeratedly grease-painted eyes, and vigorously chews bubble-gum while arguing with Humbert. Posed thus, she resembles any number of Aubrey Beardsley drawings of depraved young women, or, as Arlene Croce, in her review of the film, elegantly puts it, "Jean Harlow as imagined by Aubrey Beardsley" (191). Quilty, the subversive playwright, obviously understands the nymphet's disruptive powers better than Humbert. Again, the emphasis on her eyes and mouth discloses her nymphean evil more so than her shrill declamation, "I hate you!" That Humbert's involvement with this demon nymphet dooms him in a most *noir* fashion is most tellingly articulated in a sequence that occurs after Lolita flees the hospital with her "Uncle Gus." A back-lit struggle occurs between an obviously ill Humbert and the hospital staff, complete with looming and sinister cage-like shadows cast by glass-paned doors. A nurse intimates that Humbert's psychosis, and drunkeness, requires nothing less than a straight-jacket.

When Humbert finally locates Lolita (prompted by her letter in which she requests money), he finds her in the "de-eroticised but 'proper' place of housewife" (Nichols 129). Though she is now married and pregnant, her femininity has not been domesticated in an acceptable middle-class way. As if to reinforce this lack of ideal domestication, she sports Quilty's horn-rimmed glasses, which not only emphasise that she is still in control of the gaze, but that she has appropriated Quilty's bizarre penchant for perverse, satirical observation and commentary, not to mention his "beautiful, oriental philosophy," as she puts it. The "only guy" she was "ever really crazy about" was not only a pornographer, but her intimate co-conspirator in bringing about Humbert's misery and wretchedness. This Lolita represents a femininity that escapes ideal domestication, even when married and pregnant. She is vamp, *femme fatale*, and fast-talking dame all rolled into one. Lolita, the girl who gazes and consumes too much, we are informed at the film's end, dies in childbirth as if to reinforce the fact that, as a *femme fatale*, she is absolutely incompatible with the domestic realm and must, ultimately, be eliminated from that realm.

Kubrick's film is remarkable not because it is a particularly good film, but because of what it achieved in terms of defining popular culture's nymphet. In a 1970 interview with Joseph Gelmis, Kubrick faulted himself in one respect: "[B]ecause of the production Code and the Catholic Legion of Decency at the time, I believe I didn't sufficiently dramatize the erotic aspect of Humbert's relationship with Lolita [...]. If I could do the film over again, I would have stressed the erotic component of their relationship with the same weight Nabokov did" (87-88). Though he wished he could have given the film more erotic weight, this simply was not possible, and not only because the Hays Production Code or the Catholic Legion of Decency created a vexing impasse. It can be argued that the cinematic lexicon for a celluloid demon nymphet did not yet fully exist in order to accommodate those subtle intertextual and discursive resonances. For Lolita's eroticism, as we shall see, cinema would have to wait until the twentieth century's *fin de siècle*, and a new cinematic lexicon that would culminate in Adrian Lyne's 1997 nymphet.

VI. Bad Seeds and Demon Nymphets for a New *Fin de siècle*

> **Usually within the *femme fatale* configuration there seems to be an interplay at work between virgin innocence and lurid experience. Mystical veneration intertwines with fear and disgust. (Marsicano 3)**

> **The more conventional film relationship of children, and especially girls, to both evil and power denies them the ability to wield control, and be responsible for that kind of thought and action and, perhaps more significantly, betrays a cultural belief that children can simply not be capable of anything so awful. (Vendelin 34)**

Thirty-five years of cultural nympholepsy exist between Kubrick's film version and Lyne's version. In that thirty-five-year period, the Lolita Phenomenon proliferated in other areas of cultural production, with the nymphet donning new drag and even more knowingness. The nymphet's various masquerades were most notably presented in her cinematic representations. For example, the popular reading of Humbert and Lolita's relationship as one mediated by money and material goods transforms Lolita into the "nymphet whore" (Sinclair 155) of the 1970s. In Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), for example, twelve-year-old Jodie Foster plays a smart-mouthed, totally jaded, child-prostitute in hotpants. Similarly, in Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* (1978), twelve-year-old Brooke Shields plays a child-prostitute born and bred in a Storyville whorehouse in turn-of-the nineteenth-century New Orleans. Both films, focusing as they do on the seedy and decadent underside of American society, appropriately include female children who have not a whiff of childhood innocence.

As "millennial anxiety" blossomed in the cultural imagination in the closing decade of twentieth century, films became enamoured with the concept of Lolita, and a brood of extremely dangerous young vamps was hatched. That the child (femme) fatale should appear in popular films as an expression of the looming twenty-first century, and the prevailing mood of end-dominated uncertainty, is not surprising. A new cinematic expression of cultural pessimism was required, but, as Beauvoir explains, "any attempt to revive the vamp and her mystery was out of the question" (9). The adult vamp, with her mystery and penchant for draining male wealth (among other things), could not be plausibly "revived;" she, however, could be transformed into a particularly lethal child (femme) fatale. Films of the 1990s reflected these psychical obsessions by emphasising the terrible dangers that lurk in the heart of the undomesticated young female. In these films, the depraved young girl becomes a metaphor for several threats to patriarchal social formations. She wages a violent assault on the nuclear family, threatens the middle-class's accumulation of wealth, and has the uncanny ability to bring civilised society to its knees. The Lolitas of the twentieth century's *fin de siècle* are sexy, trashy, violent, without innocence, and congruent with the *zeitgeist*.

Take, for example, the erotic thriller, *Poison Ivy* (1992), in which the Lolita-type becomes the fatally alluring, but dangerously violent, schoolgirl-on-scholarship. Drew Barrymore plays Ivy, a product of nasty inner-city decay who, via middle-class charity, is introduced into the wealthy suburbs. Rather than feel gratitude for such charity, as would befit a Shirley Temple character, this poor schoolgirl's maniacal desire for money and material goods wreaks literal chaos and death. In the opening scene, Ivy swings sensually from a tree, while much visual ado is made of her wardrobe which, as clearly as Kubrick's Lolita's ensemble did, establishes her as a teenage Theda Bara for the nineties. Her outfit is a semiotic *mélange* of the troubled youth that suburban middle-class America fears the most: she sports a short skirt, worn-out cowboy boots, a leather jacket (on the back of which is airbrushed an image of a sword-brandishing woman astride a feral cat), and gothic jewellery. With her pierced nose, bright red lips, badly-bleached blonde hair, and a trashy stick-on tattoo on her upper thigh, she is, as the voice-over by the dull and ugly Silvie Cooper (Sara Gilbert) informs us, a "slut."

This poisonous girl insinuates herself into the privileged Cooper household and, with her wily charms, beguiles every member of the Cooper family. With experienced manoeuvres worthy of a high-priced courtesan, she seduces the father (Tom Skerritt), who is the ultimate mid-life crisis male, then later kills the quaintly dying mother (Cheryl Ladd). All the while, Ivy appropriates for herself the wealth and material goods that "rightfully" belong to privileged circles. As father and daughter heroically disentangle themselves from Ivy's poisonous vines, Ivy, in good *femme fatale* form, plummets to her deserved death during a violent confrontation with the daughter. Though simplistic, the ideological message is clear: inner-city poverty poses a serious threat to suburban wealth and family. Such a girl reverses the Temple formula in which the girl-child embodies a loveable, harmless working class worthy of middle-class charity.

While the child (femme) fatale can embody the threat of the poor and dispossessed, as in *Poison Ivy*, she can also serve to showcase the domestic decay that exists in privileged circles. In *The Crush* (1993), the Lolita-type becomes a spoiled suburban rich girl who, through lack of parental supervision, develops serious psycho-sexual issues. Alicia Silverstone plays fourteen-year-old Darian, a hyper-intelligent but Barbie-doll sexy blonde Venus. Outwardly, she appears to be a perfectly normal and very accomplished girl. Yet it is made clear in the film that while her parents provide her with all the material comforts and opportunities that wealth can buy, they are ever-absent from the domestic sphere. Both parents are too self-absorbed to notice that Darian has become a lethal child (femme) fatale.

When the twice-her-age Nicholas Eliot (Cary Elwes) rents the guest house, Darian's teen lust runs amok and becomes full-fledged psychosis. But we were given a hint that this would be the case from her first appearance in the film in which she lowers her sunglasses just a tad to peer at Nick over the hood of his car (the promotional poster, too, lavishes attention on her sunglasses). This will be a girl who attempts to control male desire by being simultaneously an enigma and a spectacle. She drapes herself over Nick's car, leans against door jams in a sultry way, fondles his cigar, and sunbathes in the backyard where the object of her desire is sure to get a good view of her. When Nick (who is initially intrigued) rejects her overt sexual advances, her psychotic, conniving and violent nature emerges full force and, not surprisingly, at the same time as her first period.[60] The film ends with Darian institutionalised, but not reformed. In the closing scene, we find her turning those beguiling charms on her "innocent" and trusting psychiatrist.

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[60] A similar motif occurs in the 1976 horror film, *Carrie*, in which "the trigger for the unleashing of Carrie White's destructive psychic abilities coincides with her first menses" (Vendelin 34).

Like Darian in *The Crush*, the nymphet is a culturally violent image, an aspect that is literally articulated in Luc Besson's film, *The Professional* [*Leon*] (1994). In this joint American-French production, Natalie Portman portrays a twelve-year-old girl whose desire for a hitman, Leon (Jean Reno), grows the more she learns how to handle high-powered firearms. The introductory, and sexualising, shot of Mathilda begins with her legs, pans upward to her cigarette, takes note of the black ribbon around her neck, then finally rests on her boyishly bobbed hair. With the Parisian-style accordion music that accompanies her image, we are encouraged to characterise her as an exotic, sultry *allumeuse*. When Mathilda's low-class, drug-dealing family is killed, she finds refuge with Leon, the mysterious next-door neighbour who happens to be a "cleaner." She too decides that she would like to be a hitman, and thereby symbolically replaces her phallic cigarette with an even more phallic gun. Mathilda, who peers through Leon's sunglasses and down the barrel of a gun, nicely articulates the violent, disruptive power of the young girl's gaze and desire. As in the Temple film, *Little Miss Marker*, the criminal goes "sappy" on the kid, but Mathilda is no innocent Temple-type. As if to reinforce this fact, violence and desire are fused in a relationship that culminates in a fiery symphony of slaughter. Leon, needless to say, must die rather than become a better citizen.

So intriguing was the *petite* vamp that literary masterpieces other than Nabokov's novel provided material for "adapting" the nymphet. The 1996 film version of Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, suggests that perhaps Lolita and her ilk had taken root in America right from its Puritan foundation. The film, set in Salem, opens with a group of girls (varying in age from very young to teenage) sneaking off to the woods late at night to work Voodoo love magic on the men they desire. The wanton activities of these Puritan maenads, who dance around a fire in various stages of undress, unleash a wave of accusations of witchcraft, and several executions. The community of Salem is brought to its knees in fear and submission before these figures of young female power. Though Miller's play was once viewed as an allegory of McCarthyism, the film (like Miller's play) metaphorically deploys young girls' bodies to point to the very source of social paranoia and hysteria. It is young female desire and a "whore's vengeance" that lead to social chaos.

The Lolita image is fraught with the mystery that surrounds female sexuality. As such, an arty soft-core French Lolita was adapted from Marguerite Duras's *L'amant* (1984), a novel that deals explicitly with female desire. In Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1992 film version, a fifteen-and-a-half-year-old girl (coltish Jane March), in total control of her seductive prowess and sexual faculties, sends her older Chinese lover (Tony Leung) into a paroxysm of life-long desire and despair. The girl's sexual body acts as a central metaphor for several acts of social and moral transgression: race, class and age are boundaries simultaneously crossed in an illicit affair that renders masculinity as impotence, and femininity as strength. The elegant voice-over narration by the now older female protagonist establishes her childhood fantasies and memories as a site for female eroticism, and sexual activity, that is far from traumatic. As in Kubrick's *Lolita*, the girl's theft of the masculine flaunts itself in wardrobe: she wears a man's fedora with a black band and high-heeled sequinned cabaret shoes.

She is a *petite* French Dietrich in 1929 Indochina, a setting that is always hot, moist and languid.

Adrian Lyne had at his disposal these various cinematic blasphemies from which to draw his image of Lolita. Yet, surprisingly, he did not overtly do so. There was much heated debate, and even hotter scandal, surrounding the production and release of this 1997 film, but it premiered, then disappeared, and is now perched next to Kubrick's *Lolita* on the shelves in video rental stores. This is unfortunate because this film version of *Lolita* is queasy much in the way Nabokov's novel is queasy. In Lyne's film Lolita is presented as very young, but she is not a readily digestible teen-queen-cum-wayward-girl as in Kubrick's film. Nor is she easily identified as a victim of sexual child abuse. Lyne's film, in its attempts to be as faithful to the novel as possible, restores the nymphet's original "tender dreamy childishness" to the culturally produced "eerie vulgarity."

VI. Adrian Lyne's Return to Original Sin

> **In the popular imagination, Lolita is this stupendous little kitten. And in the film we certainly paint her so. But in the book she's absolutely ghastly—cheap, not pretty, bad teeth, bad skin, smelly—that's the drama, that he's besotted by this *awful* girl. (Jeremy Irons, qtd. in Wurtzel 106)**
>
> **Planting sexuality unequivocally onto the child requires a willingness on the part of the filmmaker [...] to be satisfied with a marginal movie, or to bear up under a storm of outrage. (Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence* 124)**
>
> **If 'Lolita' doesn't shock, it's pointless. (Kroll 72)**

Croce claimed, in her 1962 review of Kubrick's film, that the image of fourteen-year-old Sue Lyon as Lolita "won't please all the nympholeptics all the time" (191). Lyon appeared too old, too sophisticated, and too perfectly coifed to be Humbert's ideal nymphet. Greg Jenkins posits that Kubrick's choice of actress Lyon was "safe ground" in that Humbert's actions, "if not defensible, are now quite understandable" (40). Jenkins is suggesting that Kubrick's Lolita, as a knowing, worldly teenager, is a perceptibly stable image. Audiences could feel quite certain about the kind of girl with whom Humbert had become involved. Positioned as a teenage girl who happily swims in a sea of commodities and sex, she resembles the classic gold-digger, but one who is placated by the accoutrements of youth culture rather than by furs and diamonds.

Croce probably would have agreed that Lyne's 1997 image of Lolita does please the "nympholeptics," at least those who have well-thumbed copies of Nabokov's novel. If the Humbert of the novel had filmed his nymphet, she may very well have resembled fourteen-year-old Dominique Swain, a girl who delicately hovers between childhood and emerging young womanhood, at once naïve and knowing. Jack Kroll, in his review of the film for *Newsweek*, notes that this new Lolita is "closer to Nabokov's archetypal idea of the 'nymphet' than Sue Lyon who projected an older, more slutty seductiveness" (72). Kroll's assessment is evident in the image of Swain that accompanied his review (fig. 5:4). Rather than a stable, readily identifiable type of girl-child, Lyne's Lolita is constructed as a composite of partial, often contradictory, characteristics: she is a little girl with braces and braids; a coy, flirtatious sex-kitten; a helpless victim of Humbert's desire; a cruel manipulator; a prostitute; and an insensitive brat.

For a culture that enjoys easily manageable binaries, the film's emphasis on the girl-child's ambiguity is challenging for two rather contradictory reasons. First of all, Lyne's Lolita does not conform to the Kubrick-inspired cinematic Lolita of late-twentieth-century pathology such as the conniving "Poison Ivy," the psychotic teen "Crush," the "Professional" girl with a gun, the sultry "Lover" in pumps and a fedora, or the wanton Puritan maenad. Philip Martin, in his essay, "Once, Twice, Three Times Lolita," points out, "From a marketer's point of view, the chief flaw of Lyne's *Lolita* might be that it fails to misrepresent Nabokov's *Lolita* to the degree that might have made it a commercial success. Lyne and [screenwriter] Schiff opt not to play up to the vulgar and common misconception of *Lolita* [...]" (par. 19). One promotional image that circulated during the film's troubled release pointed in the direction of a trashy Lolita. In the photograph that accompanied Anthony Lane's film review for

Page 211 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 5:4, a promotional image for Adrian Lyne's film, *Lolita* (Lions Gate, 1997); rpt. in Jack Kroll, "Lolita's Fatal Attraction," *Newsweek* (October 6, 1997) 72.

The New Yorker, Lolita, wearing jewel-encrusted sunglasses, is provocatively photographed as a would-be *Playboy* centrefold (fig. 5:5). One of her arms is placed behind her head, and the fingers of her other hand, not surprisingly, are suggestively placed near her parted, hot-pink lipstick-coloured lips. Her accoutrements suggest a glamourous vixen with the mouth of a vamp, a child (femme) fatale of pure decadence.

The second reason this Lolita posed such a challenge, as Charles Taylor comments in his essay, "Nymphet Mania," is that "the very notion of 'Lolita' seems more daring than it did forty years ago" (par.15). Lolita (both novel and cultural icon) now resonates with "real life" situations of sexual child abuse that have proliferated in mainstream consciousness. Critical hackles could not help but rise to the occasion when it was announced that Nabokov's novel was to be placed in the hands of a commercial filmmaker such as Lyne, a director notorious for his glossy, soft-core eroticism.[61] When Lyne was shooting his adaptation of *Lolita*, society was inundated with tales of sexual child abuse, paedophiles, and Internet kiddy porn. The March 24, 1998 *Daily Mail* in the UK nicely pointed out the problems faced by Lyne in the headline, "Outrage as censors pass Lolita film," while inside, the review blared, "Perverts will flock to this travesty" (qtd. in Nick 21). The words "Outrage" and "Pervert" are, of course, the *lingua franca* of imperilled "innocence." These larger social narratives about the threats to childhood sexual innocence, as we shall see, have left their traces in Lyne's representational strategy.

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[61] His films include *9 ½ Weeks* (1986), *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Indecent Proposal* (1993), all of which deal with obsessive sexual desires, and "insidious politics that rise like weeds from his favored fables of Womanly snakes loosed in the gardens of rational Man" (McKinney 49).

Page 213 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed was Figure 5:5, a promotional image for Adrian Lyne's film, *Lolita* (Lions Gate, 1997); rpt. in Anthony Lane, "Lo and Behold," *The New Yorker* (March 2, 1998) 183.

In 1962, it was possible to create comedic satire out of Humbert's predilection because, as Elizabeth Kaye writes in her piece for *Esquire*, titled "Lolita: The Second Coming," that "if sex with young girls was a prevailing male fantasy, it was presumed to be primarily a fantasy" (64). By the 1990s, however, the fantasy had turned into pure social tragedy. Kaye comments that this was a time "when authority everywhere was being questioned, previous certainties became doubted: the goodwill of teachers and priests; the conception of family as a haven" (64). When social certainties are called into question, the prevailing mood, like that at the turn of the nineteenth century, is one of pessimism and uncertainty. Social institutions that play specific roles in constructing the child and then protecting it—such as the home, the school, the church, and the law—seem all the more fragile and unable to offer a sense of social stability.

The fact that both the vulgar Lolita and the Lolita as victim share an equal place in the characterisation points to the complex social concerns that now, more than ever, circulate around the body of the girl-child. Lyne's image of Lolita manages to locate, then convey, a precise and delicate line between the girl-child as a seductive enchantress, and the girl-child as a common, but innocent, brat. What occurs in Lyne's film is a cinematic confrontation between these two images of Lolita, a confrontation which discloses the paradoxically erotic but fearful ubiquitous gaze at little girls in contemporary society. The Lolita Phenomenon is unmasked to reveal its *fin-de-siècle* face; specifically, nostalgia for an innocent past, and a fear that the future will unfold in an unacceptable, even chaotic way.

The Lolita of 1962 is quite different from the Lolita of 1997. The transformation that occurs in the figure of Lolita is strikingly perceptible in what the Humbert of the novel calls "the impact of passionate recognition" (*Lolita* 39) in Charlotte's backyard. In Kubrick's *Lolita*, the girl is a stereotypical temptress, a spectacle of erotic depravity, and a body of cultural excess. References to Humbert's first love, Annabel, as the psychological source, and justification, for his desire were not necessary. The image of Sue Lyon in her *femme fatale* masquerade was reason enough. In Lyne's film, however, Humbert's recognition is informed by a previous misty, nostalgic, flashback sequence to the sensual seaside girl of Humbert's past, a girl seemingly plucked out of a painting by Philip Wilson Steer, then photographed by David Hamilton. Thus the first shots of Lolita in the backyard are already eroticised by a pure nostalgic longing. Humbert sees Lolita, prone on a lush carpet of grass, reading a movie magazine, while droplets of water from a spurting sprinkler soak her filmy dress. Absent is the excess of female sexuality signalled by attire, and rather than usurping the gaze as Kubrick's Lolita does, this Lolita smilingly displays her braces then looks away. In this scene we are presented with an image of a fairly ordinary girl who, apparently, has the power to seduce in spite of herself.

Lyne's version of Lolita, as Martin points out, is "a child, but a child with erotic potential [...]" (par. 5); in other words, she has a sexuality that can become either socially acceptable or socially disruptive. By invoking the very question of childhood sexuality, the image of the child (femme) fatale is fraught with concerns about how that potential sexuality will manifest itself, either in a situation of domestic containment or as the dreaded female sexual excess. In Lyne's film, the "erotic potential" of the girl-child is depicted in a complex, three-way construction: firstly, through Humbert's voice-over narration and the vaguely subjective shots of his observations; secondly, Lolita's own awareness, and eventual control, of her sexual power; and lastly, the film's overall strategies that bring these two perspectives into a shifting and fluid relation. Lyne's film, by emphasising such fluidity and instability, in effect comments on the fragility and instability of what Walkerdine calls the "sanitised space of innocent childhood" (170). Lolita becomes a figure precariously situated at the imaginary boundary that separates the ideal asexual girl from the disruptive sexual girl. When such culturally constructed binaries are destabilised, a morally confused and complex ground is established in which Lolita, like the *femme fatale* of old, reflects a "fear of loss of stability, identity, and security" (Place 37). The young female body, again, functioning as a larger societal metaphor, embodies the prevailing twentieth-century *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere of perplexity and uncertainty.

In the opening sequence, this moral and cultural uncertainty is articulated by a misty landscape through which a blood-bespattered Humbert drives his car, while clutching a single bobby-pin in his fingers. His car languidly swerves and veers across the pavement, and in and out of the frame, suggesting both a transgression of the social "rules of the road" and the condemnation that results from such transgression. The film follows a course similar to Humbert's driving by presenting what McKinney calls "a core of unmelodramatic doom" (52). The screenplay "selectively dices the novel for its lowest scenes of humiliation [...]" (49), then arranges these scenes into a narrative structure that, like a *film noir*, can only spiral downward. This is a melancholy road movie about bad driving and, therefore, a movie about loss of control. A cabby swerves dramatically to miss a dog. Charlotte grinds her gears. Lolita, perched on Humbert's lap, lurches the car into a gas station. Humbert blows a tire, and the car skids out of control. In a wild panic, Humbert crashes into garbage cans and walls on his way to the hospital from which Lolita has disappeared. "Only inhuman Quilty has mastered his machine" notes Corliss ("Lolita: From Lyon to Lyne" 37).

If the film charts Humbert's loss of control and his downward spiral into degradation, it also charts Lolita's growing sexual awareness as one that is misdirected into unacceptable behaviour by society's moral standards—a perversion, in fact, of ideal femininity. Whereas Kubrick's Lolita displayed a sexuality that was consistent from start to last, Lyne's Lolita displays a sexual awareness that is transformed from erotic potential to erotic perversion. Because Lolita's sexuality is constructed as so dangerously precarious, it evokes the contemporary cultural belief that childhood sexuality has, as writer Judith Levine explains in her book, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*, "the potential for wreaking the greatest personal and societal devastation" (xxiii). This particular logic is played out in such a way that Lolita, misdirected as she is from the domestic ideal, acquires attitudes and behaviours typical of the socially disruptive *femme fatale*. The girl with Judy Garland braids at the beginning of the film is transformed into the manipulative gold-digger whose fingers travel up Humbert's trousers in order to procure a larger allowance and permission to participate in the school play. She becomes a girl who, like a wily prostitute, stops mid-session to exact more money from Humbert. This is a girl who undresses before Humbert and invites him to bed in order to convince him to leave Beardsley so she can run off with her other lover. Lolita is a girl who learns how to map out Humbert's desire with as much exactitude as she maps out their second road trip with her lipstick.

Lolita, moreover, is not presented as simply a passive object of Humbert's erotic desire. She, in fact, possesses a sexuality that is alert, aware, and knowing. Much of her behaviour is suggestive of a young girl who behaves childishly not because she is a child, but because she knows how to manufacture fascination. Brian D. Johnson notes, in his review for *Maclean's*, that "with a glance or a gesture she shifts between innocent child and knowing seductress" (76). For example, she strolls into Humbert's room, childishly drapes herself over a chair, glides into his lap, gives him a lengthy seductive look, then asks him whether or not she is developing a pimple on her chin. Such head-snapping shifts in tone destabilise any sense of certainty about the girl's behaviour. Similarly, Lolita is able to physically intimidate Humbert with "her hands, feet and arms in constant attack on his stoic manly limbs [...]" (McKinney 50). The accoutrements of childhood become flirtatious devices: her doll assaults his lap, and her retainer is dropped in Humbert's wine glass. She is knowingly alert to the reactions she is able to generate in Humbert, and he, as Kroll points out, "becomes the captive audience for her one-girl show of accelerated sexual awareness" (72).

Despite the unnerving emphasis on Lolita's obvious childishness, the film, as McKinney notes, is "impressively erotic" (50). Although recent American child pornography laws curtailed any overt depiction of sex, the film is full of vignettes that can only be called erotic in their sensuous focus on colour, sound, texture and the sensations produced by touch. Corliss aptly notes that Lyne "has the commercial director's attention to small sensations, to the eroticism of the caught moment" ("Lolita: From Lyon to Lyne" 37). In this respect, the fact that the more overt sexual scenes were left on the cutting-room floor only works to heighten the erotic ambience. This is an eroticism built upon settings that are moist, lush, and illuminated by rich colours: streets are lined with the harsh red, white and blue of the American flag; natural settings seem to be Arcadias dripping with deep greens and browns; the bright whites of sheets hung out to dry, or swelling in a hotel room, seem simultaneously Ivory soap clean and lustily inviting; and the sharp red of a maraschino cherry tops a gooey chocolate soda. Diegetic sounds, too, are so precisely articulated that an icebox literally roars, scotch makes ice crackle, a cigarette rights itself in an ashtray with a faint sigh, and cloth rubs against flesh with musical delicacy.

In this milieu of heightened sensuous and sensual perceptions, the film visually constructs a world of subtle, guilty pleasures. While these pleasures are the stock-in-trade features of many mainstream Hollywood films, such sensations are also the mainstay of contemporary consumer culture with its emphasis on the erotics of consumption. Leslie Dick, in his review for *Sight and Sound*, astutely perceives that the film's cinematography recalls "a very upmarket advert" (52). Lolita, languishing in the moist backyard, could be the waifish Kate Moss dripping with Calvin Klein's "Obsession." She sits in the light of an open refrigerator door, eating raspberries and ice cream, which could also be an advertisement for the late-night lure of Häagen-Dazs. As Lolita pins the crisp clean sheets to a clothes line she could be a figure in an advertisement for Sunlight laundry detergent. Lolita is as much a product of popular culture as she is a product of Humbert's projections.

Kaye notes that Nabokov's novel "locates the precise but obscure juncture between high and low culture, between trash and art" (62). Similarly, Lyne's approach to depicting the texture of Humbert's experience of America, and the American "girleen" Lolita, brings together the languid pacing of a high-brow European film style with a raucous profusion of popular culture. Motel cabins are shaped like tepees and contain beds that, with a few inserted coins, are transformed into "magic fingers." On one such bed Lolita, in heart-shaped sunglasses, sings along in literal vibrato with the song "Amor." She flails her arms and legs to novelty pop-jazz music. American cars, with their cod-piece radiator grills, menacingly follow Humbert and his ward. Lolita's world is one of garbage-generating consumption: hardened bubble gum and caps from soda bottles litter the inside of Humbert's car.

Humbert's relationship with this Lolita is as unstable as his relationship with American popular culture. The dynamic of Humbert and Lolita's relationship is fluid and changing from one encounter to the next. McKinney notes that the implication that "power can be shared, transferred, ambiguous in such situations" is not "politically correct" but "it is emotionally valid and as real a perception as can be caught about these characters" (50). The shifting power involved in the nymphet's sexuality and Humbert's control of it, and eventual lack thereof, is articulated by the camera's shifting viewpoint. At the Enchanted Hunters hotel, for example, Lolita seduces Humbert by sitting on top of him, and childishly removes her retainer, while the camera angles work to complicate the scene: "We look down on him, up at her: Who has control here?" (50), McKinney asks. He goes on to say,

> Their final intimacy is rape, with Humbert beginning as attacker, and ending as abject supplicant, a scene remarkable for its implication of the unseen penis as a siphon transferring power from man to girl. By this point we are looking down on her, up at him: again the presumption of control is complicated by viewpoint. (50)

The only scenes in which power can be viewed as shared equally between the two are scenes of mutual sorrow or of mutual degradation. For example, in a sleazy, fly-infested motel, we find Lolita sitting on Humbert's lap reading the funnies. They do not look at each other, yet each experiences separate, private pleasure as the rocking of the chair becomes the rocking of masturbation. Rather than a lyrical take that would befit a love scene, the scene is abruptly cut as the camera pans upward to a ceiling fan and a premature fade. Such a disruption to the languid rhythm of the film occurs again when the two, in bed, claw with fierce hysteria at the loose change she has demanded in mid-intercourse. The shots are brief, quick and fragmented, with both Humbert and Lolita appearing equally emotionally impoverished: he an abject Zeus, and she a desperate Danae under his rain of gold.

In one of the final scenes of the film, Humbert takes one last look at the "dead leaf echo" (*Lolita* 277) of his nymphet, standing on the porch of her shabby home. In a final burst of visual poignancy, one that echoes Visconti's film, *Death in Venice*, the Lolita of old waves good-bye. This cinematic moment is particularly apt because Lyne's film signalled the beginning of the end for this particular version of the Lolita

Phenomenon in popular culture, and Lolita's farewell wave signalled her temporary exit. Lyne's melancholy film touched on every aspect, and every nerve, of the Lolita Phenomenon: the desire, the anxiety, the nostalgia, the cultural melancholy and ultimately the sense of shame.

When Humbert confronts Quilty, his double, he is mortified by this man who likes to make pornographic movies, collects erotica, debauches the daughters (and granddaughters) of cleaning ladies, blackmails officials with their dirty secrets, and watches executions. During Humbert's confrontation with the perverse visual and sexual excesses of North American culture, the dark side of the Lolita figure, the audience is equally disgusted, remorseful, and embarrassed. Lolita, the "emblem of all that is wrong with society" (Marsicano 21), is transformed into a kind of Dickensian child who shames the adult world for all its excesses. No one actually needed to see Lyne's film: all the talk, the furore, and the outrage that surrounded the film was sufficient to provoke a form of social self-reflexivity and self-examination. The Lolita Phenomenon, for the time being, "tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished" (*Lolita* 39).

Chapter Six: Conclusions

> **The apocalyptic types—empire, decadence and renovation, progress and catastrophe—are fed by history and underlie our ways of making sense of the world from where we stand, in the middest. (Kermode 29).**
>
> ***Lolita* could have, may have, given part of the impetus which later grew, like a cancerous tissue, into a decadent society's obscene death throes. (Molnar 12)**
>
> **[A] virgin with a weapon [is] the fittest guardian angel for a houseful of whores. (Carter 38)**

I. The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon

The Lolita-like figures and child (femmes) fatales pulled together for this study, and from several literary and visual traditions, are figures emblazoned with the cultural anxiety, distress and trauma that mark both the turn of the nineteenth century, and the turn of the twentieth. The Lolita Phenomenon—or, as I have called these various figures, the phenomenon of the child (femme) fatale—points to what literary critic Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending*, calls "paradigms of apocalypse" (28). In contemporary culture, words such as "epidemic" and "crisis" have gained powerful currency in an age that can only be described as *fin-de-siècle* in the full sense of the word. New and frightening diseases, global economic uncertainty, and society's relationship to its own electronic and biological technologies create morally ambiguous spaces in which the figure of the child (femme) fatale can thrive. Where Molnar sees "a decadent society's obscene death throes," I see Lolita, both novel and icon, as symptomatic of the ambiguous "sense" that culture is in its death throes.[62] Lolita and her subsequent incarnations are images of destabilised hierarchies and deep-seated concerns that society itself is not as healthy or secure as it wishes itself to be. Moral ambiguity is translated by culture into morally ambiguous texts, both in literature, painting, photography and film. Like the images of the *femme fatale* that dominated the late nineteenth century, these child (femmes) fatales function as powerful metaphors for the twentieth century's *fin-de-siècle* frettings over a potentially chaotic future.

That the young female body figures prominently in both the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, and in the twentieth-century *fin de siècle*, leads me to the conclusion that representations of femininity remain the central gauge for measuring social and moral hygiene. The regenerative potential of the female body becomes figuratively co-extensive with the concept of cultural regeneration. Regulating and controlling the female body at pubescence, and channelling it into appropriate behaviours, is one way culture attempts to control itself. As we saw in the chapter I devoted to Nabokov's novel, the intertextual strategies transform a twelve-year-old girl into a carnivalesque figure emblazoned with cultural excess. Because the novelistic language employs the codes of literary and visual culture, and the codes of both high-brow aesthetic and low-brow popular pleasures, Nabokov's novel is still able to address larger social questions in relation to framing the sexuality of young girls in all areas of contemporary culture. This new child (femme) fatale embodies taboo sexuality, which is, invariably, that which escapes ideal domestication.

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[62] Norman Podhoretz, in his article, "'*Lolita*, My Mother-in-law, The Marquis de Sade, and Larry Flynt," sounds a note similar to that of Molnar in that he wishes Nabokov had not written the book in the first place because of the taboo regions it dares society to probe.

Much is revealed when we examine the "policing" gaze society turns towards young girls, as I demonstrated in my chapters devoted to visual culture. The panic we often experience when presented with images of the child (femme) fatale result from society's own sense that it has lost all ability to control both the present and the future. The various visual fictions I examined, from late-nineteenth-century painting and photography to contemporary fashion advertising, all work within paradigms of crisis, threat, and cultural ambiguity. Visual artists who have produced provocative images of the child (femme) fatale, with all her territorial tensions and conflated binaries, transform the image of ideal girlhood into something less than ideal. Humbert's ardent gaze at his various nymphets was already well-established territory for Victorians such as Philip Wilson Steer, with his erotic seaside Salomes, or Lewis Carroll, with his "dusty and dreadful charade" (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* 81). Avant-garde Die Brücke artists also understood that by tinkering with representations of young girls, they could provocatively undermine sacred cultural territory while contemplating modernity's underlying savagery. And Balthus, the Freud of painting, added an overt sensual dimension to the visual territory with his theatre of enigmatic, erotic nymphets. The Balthus girl, without a whiff of innocence, yet with much perversity, becomes something like a beast of the apocalypse who demolishes all cherished social values and ideals once embodied by the figure of the innocent girl.

The Lolita Phenomenon in contemporary photography adds a poignant touch, or rather "wound," to feelings of cultural melancholy. Both voyeurism and social surveillance become blurred in late-twentieth-century photography. Since paintings of girls no longer function as the primary visual evidence for girlhood purity, society expects photography, with its strong adherence to the referent, to document innocence. Yet even here, the cultural solace gleaned from the soothing gaze at girlhood innocence has been undermined. I invoked Max Nordau's fretful comment from *Degeneration* as exemplary of late-twentieth-century anxiety; that is, "Things as they are totter and plunge, and they are suffered to reel and fall, because man is weary, and there is no faith that is worth an effort to uphold them" (5-6). Sensations of "tottering" and "plunging" are what one experiences when looking at photographs by David Hamilton and Sally Mann, two photographers who have subverted the idealising traditions of nineteenth-century visual culture. Hamilton's visual rhetoric of illicit pornographic pleasures, and Mann's subtle subversion of the concept of potential domestic femininity, both call into question the idealising structures that have informed the way we imagine ideal, asexual girlhood. And both photographers provoke larger off-frame social anxieties about representation and response. The most catastrophic visual disruptions in dominant ideology are the sickly and diseased waifs and the sexually barren, machine-like child (femmes) fatales in fashion advertising. Such images visually thematise the very notion of a chaotically unfolding future, and in the name of marketing, produce the sense of "pathos" that is a distinctly *fin-de-siècle* emotion. Photographs of Lolita-like creatures whether high-brow or low-brow, as we saw, always sit next to the "small ghost" (*Lolita* 140) of a dead ideal.

Apocalypse, catastrophe and *fin-de-siècle* anxiety are best articulated by a teleological narrative that invokes the "sense of an ending," as Kermode called it. In this respect, contemporary film has provided abundant means for examining the image of the child (femme) fatale with all her charming social threat. The contemporary celluloid Lolita is not related to the ideal innocents and cute totsies of film but, as I argued, is ideologically related to the pessimistic visions of womanhood from 1940s' American *film noir*. The cinematic demon nymphet is a disorienting force, a little vamp, and a fast-talking dame, who upsets and often obliterates the frames that would contain her. Both adaptations of Nabokov's novel by filmmakers Kubrick and Lyne draw heavily from disorienting and unstable *film noir* sensibilities, and especially the image of the *femme fatale*. As I pointed out, however, Lyne's melancholy film touched every nerve of the Lolita Phenomenon by confronting the visual and sexual excesses of North American culture. It may be, as I noted, that this particular *fin-de-siècle* version of the Lolita Phenomenon waved its farewell from her front porch with Lyne's film precisely because the film presented a provocative, ambiguous, and transgressive beauty, while simultaneously confronting that beauty.

II. Lolita: A New "Mignon"

Nabokov, slightly irritated it seems, commented on people who found nymphets "in their own households." He found it "very amusing when a friendly, polite person" would tell him that they "have a little daughter who is a regular Lolita" (*Strong Opinions* 24). That the elusive nymphet escaped from even Nabokov's authorial tyranny and moved into North American households is testimony to the larger social questions that this little child (femme) fatale addresses. Perhaps Adrian Lyne is correct when he said that even Nabokov himself missed the point of his own novel. While filming his adaptation of the novel, Lyne commented, "He didn't get it—or wouldn't get it" (qtd. in Fleming 124). Nabokov was an author who resisted all possible re-tellings of his creations. The numerous texts I examined in this study are, in a sense, attempts to re-tell the story of young female sexuality. In this respect, these figures can be called "Mignons." Mignon is a strange hermaphroditic character found in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Romantic *bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels* (1795-96). Mignon eventually escaped from her mere twelve pages in Goethe's novel and became part of a larger nineteenth-century discourse about girlhood in general. Carolyn Steedman, in her article, "New Time: Mignon and her Meanings," notes that "The nineteenth century took Mignon as its own, and forgot *Wilhelm Meister*. She was rewritten and re-presented across every artistic form, and came to be known by and to have meaning for those who had never heard of Goethe, became in this way a figure, a trope, an image [...]" (102). In the 1790s, the word "mignon" meant a "fondling, darling, little one, favourite, the youngest in a family." It could also mean "a pet child" or a "favourite who enjoys intimacies" (107). After 1870, however, it comes to mean "little girls outside the confines of middle-class homes and outside all the modern conceptions of childhood you may possess: little girls on the street (in the general sense, but gesturing towards the other sense): little girls you fancy" (109).

Lolita is something of a new "Mignon" for contemporary culture. She is a figure, a trope and an image that is represented across all media. Her name originates in Nabokov's novel, but she also has her precedents in the late nineteenth century. Lolita is more than the eponymous character from a notorious novel, but is a figure that has acquired new, often apocalyptic, meanings as she moves about in popular culture. The purpose of my study was to bring together Lolita and her kindred child (femmes) fatales in order to examine what precisely Lolita has come to mean for contemporary culture. As I have been stressing, Lolita's figuration as a sexual and sexualised girl-child is a current expression of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety, which is not unlike the meaning Mignon acquired for the late nineteenth century; that is, "little girls outside the confines of middle-class homes and outside all the modern conceptions of childhood you may possess," as Steedman pointed out. The most recent meanings given to Lolita-types are by North American feminist critics and scholars whose intentions are to quell the "reeling" sensation of displacement, as well as the moral ambiguity of a "weary" society.

By briefly discussing two recent feminist approaches to Lolita and her child (femme) fatale siblings, I will take the occasion to include some personal notes on the subject matter. Current feminist readings, I believe, are attempts to reclaim and re-tell Lolita's story; to give this little "Mignon" an origin, a psychology, and a fixed and determinate meaning. For example, Kauffman claims, in "Framing Lolita: Is There a Woman in the Text?," that the "challenge for feminist criticism" is "to read against the grain, to resist Humbert's rhetorical ruses *and* Nabokov's afterword" in order to "undermine the representational fallacy" (59). Kauffman quotes Judith

Fetterly, who argues that "the female reader is co-opted into participating in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself" (62). In a similar vein, Elizabeth Patnoe, in her article, "Lolita Misrepresented, Lolita Reclaimed," urges "those of us who have been excluded from the hegemonic reading of Lolita resuscitate the character" and "reclaim the book" from the "co-opted, mythical Lolita" (82). The "violating Lolita" of popular culture is "as contrary to birth-giving and nurturing as possible" (82).

The reason I have resisted current feminist readings of Nabokov's novel, and popular culture's iconic Lolita, is that, as we can see from the comments I include here, such readings assume much about the largely untested notion of female subjectivity, as well as hegemonic cultural practices. In Kauffman's formulation, female subjectivity is a fixed "selfhood" that can not insinuate any ruses and pleasures into Nabokov's novel without immasculating "herself." Perhaps it would be wise to consider French writer Marguerite Duras's novel, *L'amant* (1984), for a lesson on nomadic female sexual subjectivity. Duras's novel is a paradigm of artful female pleasure in matters both textual and sexual. A poor, young French girl (ostensibly Duras herself), who has a scandalous affair with a much older, much wealthier, Chinese financier, consistently displaces herself from patriarchal social formations by dressing in ambiguous drag and assuming the subject position. She gazes at her lover, and insinuates herself into her lover's field of desire. She also has the remarkable ability to gaze upon herself as an object of desire, and by doing so, is able to negotiate within the field of desire for her own pleasure.[63] Nabokov's novel is a brutal novel, undoubtedly, and Lolita as an object of Humbert's desire suffers much. But she also manipulates Humbert, turns his desire against itself, deceives him, and remains absolutely elusive. This perverse textual elusiveness is a potential subversive pleasure that female readers can derive from the Lolita figure in both high and popular culture.

Patnoe's reading of the "violating Lolita" begs the question that has plagued this project's research and writing process: Why it is so frightening for society, and especially feminist critics, to play with the imaginary girlhood of our social unconscious, to dress girlhood in new, unusual and even dangerous drag?[64] Why does Patnoe find the lethal Lolita, who is "as contrary to birth-giving and nurturing as possible," so threatening? She assumes, it seems, that femininity is "essentially" child-bearing and nurturing. I find it troubling that the Lolita figure needs to be "reclaimed" from the popular imagination and recast as a violated victim of paedophilic male lust. This seems to have very little to do with a return to Nabokov's original intention, or a reassertion of the "truth" of masculinity and patriarchy's oppression and violation of childhood—and by extension womanhood—in the real world. Apparently, women fear imagining a girlhood that is tawdry and corrupt because it would mean a far more comprehensive re-evaluation of essentialist notions about femininity (that includes both the girl-child and the adult woman) in Western culture. I also feel that current feminist approaches to representations of girls, especially in the popular media, have done much harm to the psychic lives of both girls and women. As I have argued, the child (femme) fatale is both child and woman, innocent and depraved, violated and triumphant. As she is the very embodiment of the transitional, perhaps it is possible to read simultaneously with, and against, the grain.

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[63] For an analysis of Duras's novel in terms of nomadic female subjectivity, see Peter Brooks's *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, especially his chapter, "Transgressive Bodies" (pp. 257-286). See also Wendy Lesser's book, *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art*, in which she argues that art can transcend gender.

[64] Margaret Atwood asks a similar question in relation to "Spotty-Handed Villainesses" in general: "But is it not, today—well, somehow *unfeminist*—to depict a woman behaving badly? [...] When bad women get into literature, what are they doing there, and are they permissible, and what, if anything, do we need them for?" (par. 4). Atwood replies to her own question by stating, "We do need something like them; by which I mean, something disruptive to the static order" (par. 5). See also Sarah Aguiar's book, *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*, for a discussion of female literary characters who behave badly.

With these questions in mind, future scholarship on the Lolita Phenomenon, especially her popular incarnation, requires further, more comprehensive, analyses. For example, my study drew much of its material from Anglo-American traditions because the Lolita Phenomenon, as we have come to understand it, is primarily situated in North America and the United Kingdom. As a result, almost all scholarship on the subject is produced in English departments, or within the discipline of American studies. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that the Lolita icon is a product of North American popular culture, combined with lingering Victorian attitudes about girlhood. However, Lolita-types in both literary and visual culture should be examined in relation to representations of girlhood in other European traditions, for Nabokov was an extremely cosmopolitan creature.[65] German Expressionism is one example from visual culture that I pointed out, but we can also turn to French literary and visual culture or, especially, Latin American literature where there exist figures of girlhood that resemble, in many ways, Nabokov's ambiguous girl-child. Novels by French writers such as Colette and Duras are examples, as are literary works by, for example, Chilean writer Isabelle Allende. In Allende's short story, "Wicked Girl," a young girl seduces her mother's lodger and, remarkably, it is the adult male lodger who experiences "trauma" rather than the little girl. Furthermore, balanced readings that include literary studies, art history and film studies, as this present study initiated, can situate Lolita and her child (femme) fatale kindred within a much broader perspective, one that will take into account both North American and European literary and visual culture. Lolita, the child (femme) fatale and new Mignon of contemporary culture, can be given a far more complex and, perhaps liberating, meaning.

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[65] For an exemplary analysis of just how cosmopolitan Nabokov was in terms of his intertextuality, see Gavriel Shapiro's study, *Delicate Markers: Subtexts in Vladimir Nabokov's 'Invitation to a Beheading'*. Shapiro argues that "Nabokov's cultural background, and his creative interests and life experience" produces rich subtexts "linked to the arts, including music, theater, and cinema, but most especially literature and painting" (3).

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